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A magazine of literature and the arts

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Laney is a gynecologist, Anna an artist. They first met twenty years ago at the Donner Trail Ranch, where each was being processed for a divorce, and they have vacationed together annually ever since. Pummeled by Chinese masseurs in Beijing, feted in Abruzzi after Laney extemporaneously delivered a client's baby on newspapers spread on the floor of the cafe, adored in Arizona where Anna's Tempe exhibit of big-breasted clay goddesses was hailed as a political statement, they are a study in harmony.

—Maxine Kumin, "Flotation Devices," p. 275.

In 1863 Dostoevsky was travelling in Europe with his erstwhile mistress Apollinaria Suslova, who was refusing him her sexual favors; and while she was tormenting Dostoevsky with this cat-and-mouse game of advance and withdrawal, she herself was consumed with bitterness and resentment at having just been abandoned by her Spanish lover, a medical student known only as Salvador. Dostoevsky was gambling uninterruptedly during this trip . . .

—Joseph Frank,
"*The Gambler*: A Study in Ethnopsychology," p. 301.

We were always going to Montreal. By car, by train. We used to go Xmas shopping there back in the '80s when we had a little money—Eaton's, the Bay, the funky shops down by the river—in those years we lived in upstate N.Y. But alone I was always going to Canada, the slow fade across the border itself, over the St. Lawrence by bridge or ferry, going on across into that deep geography: forms of land & water against which the national must, I'd think, define itself. And define itself also against the U.S. and what passes here for municipal culture or New World Order or whatever this country is selling now.

—C.S. Giscombe, "Ways Over," p. 329.

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A magazine of literature and the arts

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Bennett Award Acceptance Speech, 1992

For a young writer just getting into his stride, I suppose it is the encouragement of publication assures him, as much as anything, that it's worth going on. In my own case, that encouragement came from the United States and not from my own country—partly, I imagine, because my poetic models had often been American ones, and that particular flavour seemed rather questionable to English palates. C. Day Lewis, our then poet laureate and a reader at Chatto's, returned my first full scale collection with the remark that he couldn't see the difference between this and prose. That same collection, *Seeing Is Believing*, appeared in New York. A sizeable number of poems from it had previously been published by *The Hudson Review* and it was the generous and regular support of *The Hudson* editors that helped energize my sense of purpose. It would not be too much to say that publication in America and the existence of *The Hudson Review*, one of its two editors then being Joseph Bennett, changed my entire existence.

Previously, I'd never imagined I would visit America, but suddenly I found myself unexpectedly welcome here. In 1959 Brenda and I started a habit of which we have never attempted to cure ourselves—that of coming here as often as possible. American friends and American places became paramount in our lives. Keeping up the old Victorian habit of reading aloud in the evenings, we got through an enormous quantity of classic American literature from Fenimore Cooper to the present. We also became enthusiasts for American painting. We arrived at the tail-end of abstract expressionism and we burrowed back to Sheeler, Demuth, Hopper, Eakins and to people like Frederic Church, Bierstadt, Durand. "WHO?" said our American friends. This was when the Hudson River School was still mostly banished to the cellars of the Metropolitan. We went out west. In the early sixties we fell for the deserts of New Mexico. We made friends among what are now called the native Americans there and attended their ceremonies and dances. "Do they—er—just do them for the tourists?" asked our friends in the east. We explained we had driven on lonely roads through ice and snow to see winter ceremonies at the Hopi villages. "Oh, do they have villages?" So with all the presumptuousness of youth we began selling America to the Americans. If it

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wasn't the culture of the pueblos, it was the architecture of Bernard Maybeck or the novels of Janet Lewis. I'm pleased to say our two daughters have caught this enthusiasm and one of them has also passed it on to her young husband. And all this originally started when I first began to see my poems printed in the pages of *The Hudson Review*.

We speak of the special relationship between England and America. And here is an example of it, stemming from our common language. For me that special relationship has meant that, in learning from American sources both literary and other, I was enabled to take purchase on my own English heritage, in an unforeseen way, applying what I had learned from Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams to the articulation of English English. Thus American poetry helped me to discover new possibilities in the language I spoke as an Englishman.

Almost forty years later, I find myself with a new debt of gratitude. If the young writer needs encouragement, so does the older man. The Joseph Bennett Award brings me that just when I have retired from many years of teaching at the University of Bristol where I initiated one of the first courses on American poetry in Britain. I must thank the judges for this wholly unlooked-for token of recognition. That it should come from a review that stands so undeviatingly for a broad humanism at a time when literary and university culture seem in danger of turning narrowly and fiercely partisan, this for me, is an additional bonus.

Two other sources of pleasure come to mind. I was here soon enough to meet and enjoy in the late fifties the company of Joseph Bennett himself and still treasure the sense of his lively conversation. The second source of pleasure is this: it is in America, where I first began my publishing career, that this honour has occurred and once more American generosity has helped re-enforce one's steady continuance in the practice of a difficult and exhilarating art.

The above comments were made by Charles Tomlinson upon being presented with The Hudson Review's 1992 Bennett Award at a dinner in New York on May 7, 1993.

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Comment:

Letter from Worpswede

DEAR H,

Amid miles of utterly flat moor- and farmland north of Bremen, receding for miles, often in mist, toward the North Sea, Worpswede is set on the side of the only hill in sight, the Weyerberg, an old sand dune from an epoch in which the sea extended this far. I am here in May, at the time of lilacs, apple blossoms and astonishing rhododendrons, and it is a very pleasant place to be, far more temperate than its reputation. The tour buses from Bremen and Hamburg are already rolling in, but it is easy to get away from them, for most of the Weyerberg's wooded surface has remained public, or at least open to the public, and is covered by a network of paths where everyone walks. I know that the people in search of whom I've come to Worpswede used to walk these paths, for long, civilized walks on the Weyerberg and the moorlands around it were among their chief pleasures—and once paths are formed, they are followed. It's possible here in one intimate wooded space after another to feel utterly alone. On the streets of what was once a small village, mostly of peasants subsisting on small-scale farming and the cutting of peat for sale as fuel, there must now be a dozen cafés for those times when one feels like being in company, and three times as many galleries offering the work of resident artists and artisans.

The turn from being a small rural settlement toward renown as Germany's most famous surviving artists' colony—history, alas, had other things in mind for Dachau, home of a much larger colony contemporaneous with Worpswede—began in 1884 when a young student from the academy in Düsseldorf, Fritz Mackensen, came here for the summer to paint. In 1889 he finally managed to persuade two other young painters, Otto Modersohn and Hans am Ende, to join him in Worpswede for the summer. By 1894 Fritz Overbeck and Heinrich Vogeler had joined them. In 1895 the five of them, showing as a group, achieved a great *coup* at the International Exhibition in Munich, making them famous and sought-after overnight.

What had attracted them to the place was a distinctive quality of light usually attributed to the large amount of moisture in the air, and a northern, lowland landscape not quite like any that landscape painters had ever celebrated. There were huts with thatched roofs, windmills, and long straight roads lined with birches. The moors were traversed by an elaborate network of narrow canals, on which even

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narrower boats, with their sails tarred black to resist the damp weather, made their way to the meandering River Hamme, over which the peat was transported to Bremen for sale; above it all was a huge and cloud-filled, constantly changing northern sky. For Mackensen, the founder, and later his student Paula Becker, the peasants themselves were Worpswede's chief artistic resource: the older man inclined to create large canvases mythologizing them as stoic and careworn yet simply and nobly pious, the younger woman working smaller but penetrating to something less romantic, more elemental.

By the time fame struck them, the Worpswede painters were at each other's throats, riven into what might be called conservative and progressive factions; two of the progressives, Modersohn and Vogeler, are among those I've come here in search of, who for a time liked to call themselves "the family," but the best known of them are Rainer Maria Rilke and, a distant second, Paula (Modersohn-) Becker. When, in three consecutive months in the spring of 1901, Heinrich Vogeler and Martha Schröder, Rilke and Clara Westhoff, Paula Becker and Otto Modersohn were married, all seem to have believed—Paula most passionately—that these marriages would bind "the family" even more closely together, though no modern reader will be surprised to learn that it did not work out that way.

Anyone undertaking to visit Worpswede today will be pleased to know that the Barkenhoff is still here. A museum now, it was the white house where, in its earliest days, "the family" used to gather on Sundays, the women in white dresses, the men in suits and sometimes smoking clay pipes, to talk, to hear music and, during Rilke's Worpswede sojourns, to savor his spellbinding readings and marvel at his strange ways. Vogeler had bought the place, a rundown farmhouse, shortly after coming to Worpswede, and transformed it into a showplace, every inch of it his own creation—a little island of beauty and grace fenced off from mere reality in a way that briefly, at the beginning of the new century, seemed to propitiate the Zeitgeist. It was Vogeler's invitation to come and stay at the Barkenhoff that drew Rilke to Worpswede, and readers of his early journals know how the place impressed him, both as Vogeler's creation and as a setting for Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff in their white dresses, in honor of whom, after Barkenhoff gatherings, walks, intimate conversations *à deux* in their studios, he filled many an exalted page. As a *motif* in Vogeler's paintings and engravings the Barkenhoff—its graceful Empire facade and front gateway topped by two Empire urns an instantly recognizable signature—is second only to Martha Schröder herself, the peasant girl whom he'd chosen and molded, dressed on formal occasions in clothes of his own design, and planned, without ever quite obtaining her informed consent, to make the one jewel in this gorgeous setting. The modern reader has no difficulty sensing trouble ahead: it was a project for which both of them would go on to pay the full price.

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The modest wood farmhouse where Otto Modersohn and Paula Modersohn-Becker lived their married life—when Paula was not in Paris—is also still here, a private home identified by a carved wooden sign with Paula's distinctive profile, but it stands at a busy intersection next to the Leckerschmecker Snack Restaurant and the Cafe Dolomiti, with its outdoor ice cream counter around which young people gather every evening, many with motorcycles. In it Paula bore their daughter Matthilde in 1907, and eighteen days later, finally allowed to get out of bed—candles lit everywhere, flowers in her hair, the child in her arms—collapsed and died of a lung embolism, saying only, "What a shame." (On this trip to Germany I have heard for the first time the light-hearted suggestion that these famous last words, like certain others, must be apocryphal, too good to be true—but readers of Paula's letters and journals know that she had a way of hitting the nail on the head. It was indeed a shame.)

Paula's studio in the old Brünjes farmhouse, where she loved to be alone with her painting in the daytime, and where during his first Worpswede stay Rilke loved to visit her in the evenings, is still here too, recognizable by the skylight she had made for better light, but still suitably private, quiet, hard to find. The cottage in nearby Westerwede where Clara and Rainer Maria lived in their one brief attempt at a shared domestic life, and where Clara gave birth to their daughter Ruth, was long ago struck by lightning and burned to the ground.

One house that was not here in Worpswede's heyday, but that arguably keeps Worpswede's past most alive today, is the Haus im Schluh or House in the Slough, an even older farmhouse, its roof still thatched as it has always been, in the lowlands at the foot of the Weyerberg. Martha Vogeler had its massive framework moved to Worpswede and reassembled when she finally moved out of the Barkenhoff—an idealist/communist commune at the time, for Vogeler had not ceased worshipping at the Zeitgeist's shrine—with the couple's three daughters in 1920. It houses not only the *pension* where I am staying, a large collection of Vogeler's work and (in another building), the weaving school Martha established to support herself and the children, but the Worpswede Archive. It is still in family hands: the Vogelers' second daughter Bettina is in charge of the weaving classes, and their youngest daughter Martha runs the *pension*. Both are in their eighties, but plans have been made for succession within the Vogeler family.

Walking the trails around the Weyerberg one comes suddenly on an assortment of monuments, all of them rather neglected and hidden by vegetation, all entwined in Worpswede stories. There is the Findorff Monument, a fat red granite obelisk perhaps fifteen feet high, dedicated to the man who, in the eighteenth century, oversaw the draining of the marshes around the Weyerberg and the opening of the area to widespread settlement. When young and high-spirited, the Worpswede painters liked to climb it; when Vogeler first set eyes

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on Martha, a girl of fourteen with a tame magpie on her hand and her hair in a long braid wrapped around her head, his painter friend Fritz Overbeck was at the top, declaiming the bad verses of a poet they called the Silesian Nightingale. When, one night after a party in someone's studio, someone climbed to the top with a torch and defied all the others to follow, Paula Becker was the next one up, her zest and abandon shocking some of the men.

On another high point of the Weyerberg stands the Niedersachsenstein or Lower Saxony Stone, an enormous and ominous Expressionist red brick eagle-shape, which stands in some intense but all too ambiguous relation to the fact that large numbers of the sons of Lower Saxony lost their lives in World War I. It is the work of Bernard Hoetger, a sculptor working in Paris during Paula's last and most fateful stay there, who entered Worpswede history as the first person, aside from the husband she was trying to leave, to see how stunningly good her late work was, and tell her so when she needed such recognition almost as desperately as she needed money. He also spent an evening persuading her to reconcile with Otto Modersohn. Though she had once, in a mood she got into sometimes in which she was convinced she would die young, sketched in her journal a word-picture of the simple grave she'd like to have in the Worpswede churchyard—a trellis for roses, a gravel path, a wood plaque with nothing but her name—Hoetger succeeded in erecting as her monument one of his own melodramatic bronzes, in which a small child sits pathetically in the lap of its dead or dying, half-reclining mother. It stands near the back of the immaculate cemetery, hidden behind a wall of shrubbery which helps keep the many pilgrims to this shrine from disrupting the peace of the whole.

The church itself, Findorff's work, is instantly recognizable by its modest red and white steeple from many a Worpswede landscape painting; one Sunday Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff, both just returned from Paris and feeling exuberant, climbed this tower and rang the bells, only to learn that by doing so they had mobilized the fire brigade.

In the woods near the Barkenhoff there is a large flat stone with carved decoration and inscriptions, placed in memory of Ludwig Roselius, the Bremen industrialist who perfected the first decaffeinated coffee, Kaffee HAG, still to be had in Bremen. A patron and collector, he financed at times both Hoetger and Vogeler, securing collections of their work as well as Paula's after her death. With his taste and (often) Roselius's money, Hoetger was able to inflict on Worpswede a series of major architectural events, most of them at least faintly unpleasant but surrounded by dense vegetation. Roselius housed his collection of Paula's work in the Böttcherstrasse, a narrow street that is now one of Bremen's chief tourist attractions, with architecture by Hoetger. (When, after Hitler came to power, Paula's work was declared degenerate and confiscated, and Hoetger too was

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regarded with suspicion, Roselius was able to persuade Hitler not to have the entire project destroyed, but to leave it standing, with admonitory signs, as a monument to decadence and error.) Roselius also underwrote for a time Vogeler's Barkenhoff commune, chiefly by buying some piece of Vogeler's work each time it ran out of money; they kept up a lively capitalist-communist correspondence, later published, in which Roselius kept trying to persuade Vogeler to drop his mad idealist notions in exchange for lavish patronage, and Vogeler kept trying to get Roselius to see all the clear signs that mankind's one true future had been born in the Soviet Union. It is not yet completely clear whether, evacuated against his will to Kazakhstan with other expatriate Germans as Hitler's armies approached Moscow, he died there of the effects of hunger and exposure still believing. It is possible that he did: he had a great will to believe, and Hoetger had once caricatured him as *Heinrich der Gläubige*, Heinrich the Believing.

Besides the Haus im Schluh there are three substantial collections of early Worpswede art here. In two of them, the work is for sale; the third, the *Grosse Kunstschau*, is a museum, another Hoetger structure (adjoined by his vivid and eccentric Café Worpswede) containing more of Roselius' collection. It houses *The Concert*, a prime Worpswede icon, Vogeler's large painting of "the family" in its early days, assembled on the Barkenhoff terrace. The three-part composition is almost as symmetrical as the terrace itself: on the right, Vogeler and his brother Franz (who partly obscures him) play violin and guitar, a third man in the background, flute; in the center Martha is posed pensively on the stairs with the Vogelers' whippet; on the left, Otto, Clara, Paula and another woman listen, each profoundly separate. Rilke is not there, though he might have been; to those who know the story, his absence is almost a presence. The whole is, at best, strangely static, diorama-like; at times it has, for all its realism, the underwater feel of a dreamscape conceived by Magritte or Paul Delvaux, though none of its contradictions has risen quite to the surface.

I have, it occurs to me, been *reading* Worpswede here, as though it were a text; it is my knowing anecdotal reading of *The Concert* above all that makes me feel at times that I may have brought too much knowledge to Worpswede, enough to prevent me from *seeing* the place and its art. What would *The Concert* look like to someone who didn't know who these figures were, or how someone else's absence from the picture could be an issue? It's too late for me to know—even two years ago, when I came here for the first time, I knew too much when I saw it to be even briefly, as I'd have liked to be, all eyes. Is it all my fault, though? Could a painter of greater gift have created a work so compelling that all this knowledge would have fallen like scales, as they say, from these eyes of mine?

The answer is yes, and the evidence lies about twenty kilometers away, in the twenty-six paintings of Paula Modersohn-Becker on

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display around the second floor landing of the *Kunsthalle* in Bremen—some of them there now only because the Böttcherstrasse is being rebuilt. I know more about Paula than about anyone else in "the family" except Rilke, but the paintings succeed in shedding their histories, insisting only on *presence*. Even the one with the most intriguing history and the longest trail of published interpretations negates its history in this way—in fact, this one most of all. In 1906, having gone to Paris with the intent of staying there and ending her marriage to Otto Modersohn (the resolve that, for better or worse, Hoetger talked her out of, though many others put pressure on her too) she painted several nude self-portraits. It was unprecedented at the time, the books say, and she brought it off in a way I find utterly disarming. In the painting I am writing of here, she is draped only at the hips, and her abdomen, framed by her hands in a mutely expressive gesture, is so prominent that she is commonly taken to have depicted herself as pregnant, though in life she was not. (The single most appalling object I have seen on this visit is a two-foot-high porcelain figurine depicting this well-known image—all shiny and much bustier, a real dish—for sale to tourists at the Café Worpswede.)

Paula herself insisted on burdening the painting with its history by inscribing in the wet paint with the tip of her brush handle, a tool she often used to roughen the texture of her paintings, "I painted this at thirty years of age on my sixth anniversary, 1906," and signing it with the initials of her maiden name. One letter to Rilke from Clara Rilke-Westhoff has surfaced recently—though most of her letters to him have been withheld from scholars by the Rilke heirs—in which Clara, after a birthday visit to Paula just a few months before this anniversary, wrote that Paula was thinking of bearing and raising a child on her own there in Paris. It even tells us much more than we wanted to know about Paula's marriage: that for the first five years it was not consummated and that, because Otto could not understand her artistic reasons for wanting to leave, she was forced to use this fact as her chief justification. But for all this intriguing or oppressive context, the painting compels by pure human presence: I am hard-pressed to think of another self-portrait with so little posturing, so much quiet immediacy. Though the cheeks are flushed, the brown eyes, blank dots up close, meet one's eyes from further back with stunning and utterly engaging composure: This woman and painter, bold yet vulnerable, fertile yet vibrant with self, says with every inch of herself *Here I am*.

ERIC TORGERSEN

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

Contrary to John Loughery's report ("The Guggenheim Returns," Winter 1993), the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art has not "died a natural death," but is quite well and kicking. We recently received an extension from Governor Weld, who reports that it has good Karma (see *Newsweek*, January 11, 1993). We'd appreciate fact checking in the future, please.

Jennifer Trainer
Director of Development & Public Relations
Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art
North Adams, Massachusetts

John Loughery replies:

The fact is duly noted, and of course I wish Mass MOCA the best. But if that museum ever opens, *as originally envisioned and described by Mr. Krens*, I will not be the only one to be very much surprised. We are entering the age, none too soon, of manageable goals and realistic expectations in the art world.

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MAXINE KUMIN

Flotation Devices

From the outset, the all-day snorkel boat trip looked a bit tacky. The line of tourists queuing up to board was long. Three dozen in all, young, tanned and athletic looking, being handed aboard negligently by two languorous types in charge. One was a native of Minor Island and proprietary about his vessel (no shoes on board). His assistant, a lanky Louisianan with a broad Delta accent, wore a silver ring on the third toe of his left foot. The three women friends, Laney, Anna, and Maureen, divested of their shoes, which were added to the broad assortment of others' sneakers and espadrilles, hightops and sandals stuffed into canvas bags and stowed in the bow, scaled the ladder to the abbreviated upper deck in full sun.

Not their first choice, Laney remarked, but the lower deck, shaded and with cushioned seats, was packed tight. She suspects that the boat's legal limit has been exceeded but decides not to mention it. A little flicker of disappointment came and went on her still-handsome face—steep stairs were not easy, given the arthritis in her hip joints.

Practical Anna unzipped the duffel and handed round the tee shirts and cotton pants they had been advised to pack. It is odd that Anna, with her carefree, bohemian past, has in middle age become the list-maker and straw boss.

Maureen pulled on her ancient jeans. She feels a rush of affection for the worn, faded cotton. It denotes a day at home, off campus, release time. As others in some ancient religious ceremony had once anointed themselves with holy oil, each of them applied sun block 15. Anything over 15, according to a dermatologist colleague of Laney, is a waste.

While the boat was still at its moorings the heat was oppressive, seeping into what Maureen called their aging pores. Finally the engine coughed and turned over and soon the stiff breeze of passage mitigated the fierce rays of the sun.

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Laney is a gynecologist, Anna an artist. They first met twenty years ago at the Donner Trail Ranch, where each was being processed for a divorce, and they have vacationed together annually ever since. Pummeled by Chinese masseurs in Beijing, feted in Abruzzi after Laney extemporaneously delivered a client's baby on newspapers spread on the floor of the cafe, adored in Arizona where Anna's Tempe exhibit of big-breasted clay goddesses was hailed as a political statement, they are a study in harmony.

Laney is in her sixties, Anna not far behind. Like college roommates, they tell each other their dreams at breakfast. They compare wardrobes and figure faults, they inspect their old love affairs as scrupulously as botanists peering into the blush-colored thickets of pistils and stamens. Both are women who have surmounted all manner of crises to arrive at their careers.

Laney was thirty-five and the mother of three when she entered med school—battered her way in, she likes to say. Fifteen years later, a respected gynecologist who pioneered *in vitro* fertilization, she became an activist. Almost once a week you could read her expert testimony in the *Times* in court cases involving rape, abortion, and wife-beating, as it was then known. She has a file of hate mail from anti-choice fanatics—she refuses to call them pro-lifers—and has had to resort to an unlisted phone number to keep their verbal assault at bay.

Anna often remarks how spectacularly successful Laney is at separating her private life from her public one. Laney juggles grown children, grandchildren, her ex-husband's still stellar career in government to which she remains somehow inextricably connected, as casually as pots on a hot stove. It's something Anna, with two large sons of her own, always has trouble with.

Anna, who began life in a staid Midwestern Lutheran farm family, number three in a cluster of six siblings, is a blithe spirit. She can live out of her helmet, she says, and means helmet, not hat, wearing one shoulder bag and carrying a canvas duffel into battle. Travelling light disencumbers her vision, but she is never without a little sketch pad and some smudgy stumps of pencil. Shapes are what she is after, shapes and textures, ideas that can translate months and even years after into great stone figures. If you study Anna, who is short and square, you begin

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to see that she would have an up-close blocky vision of the world and that she would need to write it large in the massy sculptures she creates.

Maureen is Anna's friend and contemporary from long ago, from the days when Anna was still married to Brett, who is now dying of AIDS. Back then, Brett and Anna and Maureen went skiing together almost every weekend, along with David, who had been Maureen's childhood sweetheart and became her spouse. Back then, Maureen's Ph.D. in Comp Lit was still fresh and virtually useless. Now she is well published, long married and five years widowed, the mother of a son and a daughter, she has an endowed chair, and when she looks in the mirror she has to admit it: Her face is falling in. Her dead husband, an architect of modest but impeccable reputation, taught in the same university. It was a peaceful life. Some might have called it monotonous. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and their implacable hatred of Richard Nixon gave it some color.

By the time David died of a blood disease he had lived with for ten years, the two children were married and living on opposite coasts. Maureen had a year of insomnia, an intense, intractable sleeplessness she got through in David's woodworking shop. Midnight to dawn in his basement room she planed, routed, sanded, glued and clamped, next to his radio tuned to a twenty-four-hour classical music station. Now she sleeps lightly, but goes to bed at eleven like an obedient child. Here on the Island she has been sleeping, as she puts it, like a stone.

Laney and Maureen have never met before this rendezvous on Minor Island. Anna in a sense is their Virgil, she knows the names and locations of every beach, including the nudist one. She knows the way down to the sinister strand that once belonged to the Mellons and where a lesser relative committed suicide by leaping from a tower of obsidian onto the rocks below. She knows how to get to the dark lagoon dotted with great egg-shaped volcanic extrusions, a brilliant patch of fine sand favored by islanders and accessible only by goat path. She knows which vegetable stand has the freshest—or the least dubiously unfresh—fruits and veggies and where to buy antacid or paper towels when the island's public supply mysteriously vanishes. She further knows exactly how many gallons of

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water remain in the cistern of their borrowed house and how many minutes make an unacceptably long shower. "We never flush for Number One" is the island motto; rain water is its only potable source.

The owners of the house—a pair of pediatricians from Washington, D.C.—are patrons of Anna's. This is her seventh invitation to their hideaway perched on an outcropping overlooking the Caribbean. She knows the names and destinations of the cruise boats that anchor below the deck in the twilight and steam off around the point at dawn. She alone pilots the little Jeep that comes with the house along the treacherously narrow roads on Minor, only occasionally forgetting to drive on the left.

Today's view from the narrow balcony of the snorkel boat was its sublimely unchanging paradisaical self. Hummocks of outlying mountains on offshore islets lay ahead, dots and dashes of sailboats between them. The water, which Anna characterized as falling between sea-foam green and Gauginesque turquoise, shimmered and glinted in the full sun. The boat's motor thrummed a hypnotic sexual rhythm.

"What a great idea this was," Maureen said, and Laney murmured appreciatively. They still defer to each other a little warily, these two; sharing Anna, after all, could have created some problems but none has arisen so far.

Anna the organizer leaned back and smiled. "This is only the beginning, ladies. Wait and see."

By ten o'clock they were so ravenous that they had devoured all the turkey sandwiches and drunk half the water in their pre-frozen water bottles. At that point the intercom sputtered and coughed; the tour leader, whose name was Barnaby, came on with a hearty hallo. He pointed out Turtle Cay, Finnegan's Leap and Copenhagen Point on the left, on the right, and dead ahead. Next came a casual lecture on how to adjust your mask and snorkel.

Maureen found his Island accent all but impenetrable. "Chaucer is easy compared to this. I only get about every third word."

Anna interpreted. "He says nobody allowed off dis boat widdout wearen dis flotation device." By standing up and craning forward, they could see a limp yellow gadget shaped

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like a long bib dangling from his hand. "Apparently there's a button you press and a tube you blow into," Anna explained. "Then it inflates."

For Laney this was comforting news. Neither she nor Maureen had ever snorkeled before yesterday when in the dark lagoon, floating over angelfish and silver fry, they had practiced with rented equipment; sometimes Laney's mouthpiece seemed to leak and she came up choking on a mouthful of salty water. Rather than complain, she solved the problem by taking the whole bite plate inside her mouth and clamping her teeth on the tubing. This morning her jaw was a little sore from stretching to accommodate the foreign mouthpiece.

Maureen had felt more than a little claustrophobic face down, even in the shallows, but she forced herself to breathe normally by focussing on the coral sea fans and the little yellow-striped sergeant major fish that burst in and out of her line of vision. Suddenly she drifted over a pale green turtle as big as a toilet seat and rose up sputtering her astonishment. Luckily, she could put her feet down on sand as he zoomed away.

Toward noon they arrived at their first snorkel site, in shallow water just off Copenhagen Point. The sea was pellucid and flat. Barnaby cut the motor; his assistant, Ronnie, set two anchors.

"Perfect conditions!" Anna enthused. One by one the passengers sat down on the flat stern of the boat, rinsed their masks, spat into them and smeared the spit around with a judicious forefinger. The women smoothed the hair back from their temples and foreheads so the mask would seal. Some people began by donning their fins, others the yellow flotation vests.

Everyone seemed tremendously competent. In ones and twos they bobbled off into the transparent water and spread out like mini-submarines. A little tentatively, Maureen and Laney followed Anna into the water. Last off the boat, they straggled after the others.

Barnaby, wearing what looked like a rubberized sweater and carrying a red buoy, led the expedition. His odd covey trailed him, arms at rest by their sides like unused tentacles, buttocks bobbing above water like floating apples as they propelled

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themselves with little thrusts of their fins. A husband and wife pair stayed close on his heels, she with one hand tucked in the waistband of her mate's trunks. Another couple had lashed themselves together with a plastic line that had round bobbers attached. Clearly, staying together was a good idea. When Anna moved up with the main group, Laney and Maureen lagged, torn between wanting proximity to the boat and a desire to see what there was to see.

After about ten minutes of fanning and drifting, the main party turned in a general semicircle and splashed back raggedly.

"Barracuda!" Anna told them, spitting out her mouthpiece to say the word. Some snorkelers had actually begun to swim, using strong overarm strokes, back to the boat. It was a purposeful if not hasty retreat.

"Nothen to be skeered of," Barnaby scolded them after everyone had flapped up the ladder and regrouped. "Barracuda never bite you less you dead or dyen. Dey has to be blood in dee water."

"The book said never to invade a barracuda's resting place," Laney pronounced. She had been browsing the night before through the usual literature of place that accumulates in a vacation house. "In the presence of fresh blood, the barracuda will come out to investigate."

"And after conducting a cursory investigation," Maureen offered, "he takes a trial mouthful."

Laney thinks how refreshing Maureen is, so wryly good-humored. She has observed that women can do this for each other easily, more easily than men. Less at stake, she thinks. We are allowed to be afraid of barracudas.

"But did you see that school of creole wrasse?" Anna asked them. "The little blue and purple fish, about fifty of them, swimming in a sort of vee?"

Laney and Maureen had to admit that they hadn't. Once the boat was under way again, they were happy to cover up again against the sun and breeze. Anna dredged up a package of cookies she had been saving, and there were three pears left.

Maureen loves pears. She wishes Anna had packed more than three. How like Anna, actually, always even-handed and always in charge. She remembered the morning after a New

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Year's Eve party long ago when she and Anna found a pair of red-striped boxer shorts in the freezer. Not David's. Brett's, or maybe Lowry's? They were lodged between two bags of ice cubes.

Anna claimed she didn't recognize them. She had folded them up and put them in her shoulder bag. "At the very least they'll make a good dusting cloth," she told Maureen. Not that Anna was big on dusting, Maureen now thinks, and then feels uneasy, disloyal.

An hour later, Ronnie the Louisianan led the second shallow-water expedition, this time along a lovely sandbar abutting a coral reef that ran across the neck of an inlet. Abundant pale angel fish, filmy white ghosts with black fins and black markings like kohl around their eyes, drifted lazily past in little troops. Larger and more vivid spadefish merged with, then veered away from the gathering. It was possible, though not advisable, to put your feet down from time to time for anchor. The snorkelers were warned to be alert for fire coral and sea urchins.

Maureen wriggled closer in line to Ronnie. In case there were going to be any ugly surprises she wanted to receive an instant directive. But the viewing was leisurely and exotic. So leisurely that the woman in the red bathing cap and her male partner in whose waistband she seemed always to be rummaging almost didn't get back aboard in time. Ronnie had hauled anchor and Barnaby had already revved the engine as the two snorkelers rounded the reef.

By the time everyone had flippered out of the water after the second expedition, Laney was chilled.

"That's why these guys wear their partial wet suits," Anna said. "You have to realize, even though it's the tropics, there's about a twenty-degree difference between the water temp and your blood."

Laney pulled on her sweatshirt. She was tired. The flotation device had crept up around her shoulders and seemed to be tilting her downwards at an awkward angle, making it harder to keep up with the others. "God, my neck is stiff," she said to Maureen. "This sport is gorgeous, but fraught with peril."

"Considering how we've never done it before, I think we're making a terrific showing," Maureen told her. "Here. Let me

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try to loosen that up a little." Reaching over, she began to massage Laney's neck.

"At least we have this whole peanut heaven to ourselves," Anna said. "Gives us a chance to spread out. Want to lie down here, Lane? Wouldn't that feel better?"

"Actually, this is heaven," Laney groaned with pleasure. "You go ahead, though."

Anna promptly stretched out on the deck between the benches of the little balcony and pillowed her head on a towel. "Wake me up when we get there."

Laney thinks, Anna's tired too, she just can't admit it. She's only two years younger than I am. She's going to outlast me just by pluck. Obscurely, Laney finds this comforting.

They ran due east for another thirty minutes. The wind had picked up and there was a considerable chop. Barnaby had less to say. Occasionally he called out a place name but the farther they went the less he seemed obliged to entertain the passengers. Although they were still in sight of land, the prospect seemed less hospitable, the distances greater. Here and there vast fortresses of rocks heaved their iron sides out of water. Some had collected enough earth to support scrub growth but most were barren piles of jagged-looking stony cliffs standing six feet or so above water. The boat headed toward a long, discontinuous collection of these, shaped like the gigantic vertebrae of a flexible dinosaur.

"Okay, this year's our deep water mooren," Barnaby announced. "You gonna see everthin you came out to see, big en little. Dey was whale here last week. Jess don't go close dis side. We gonna tie up here, to dis ring the Coast Guard done cee-mented in. Reason dey done it, dey's lot of dope runnen round year."

"They drop it from planes at night with light sticks attached," Anna said. "Ganja, they call it, marijuana. Then the partners come and get it at dawn with little speedboats."

Barnaby was still explaining. "Dere's bristleworm in air, it kin sting you pretty good. Swim roun de odder side, dat's de bess place, some good caves go way in deep, and dey safe."

"What's so great about deep water?" Laney grumbled to Maureen. She thought about sitting this one out but didn't want to be the wet blanket.

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"Come on, Laney, we're gonna see us some whales," Maureen coaxed, and lowered herself into the sea.

The three women gave this side of Dinosaur Rock a broad berth. Once around the far side, true to Barnaby's prediction, there were myriad tropical fish, a football-field length of them, darting in and out of crevices, dodging staghorn coral and sea fans, even raining against their face masks and bumping blindly into their bodies. It was wildly beautiful and suffocating, all at once.

Laney looked back at the boat from time to time with a vague longing to be drying off on the little upper deck, to hear the motor chuffing its eggbeater sort of beat, and the soothing slow return journey under way. She could see Barnaby and his assistant eating their delayed lunch. Now they were drinking beer, that was it, *they* were dry and drinking beer, a whole six-pack of it while she gargled through her leaking mouthpiece, keeping up appearances. Anna and Maureen had ducked into a sort of alleyway that ran between two exposed hunks of spine. Anna was beckoning her frantically. Some incredible find, no doubt.

Laney had to paddle her way around an immense rock pillar to catch up with Anna and Maureen. Anna appeared to be sitting on a greenish plastic-covered hassock about the size of a small hay bale.

"It floats!"

"What is it?" Laney was baffled.

"Marijuana. Must have drifted in on the chop, then got wedged in here."

"What do you think we should do?"

"The first thing to do," Anna directed, "is to get it unstuck and float it out of here."

Maureen tugged, grunting. "If we just had a pry bar of some sort . . ."

Anna finally solved the problem. She took off her flotation device, dove down under the package and on her third try managed to free it by butting with her head. The three of them stroked and shoved, finally working the bale out around the last rock onto the open sea.

The boat was gone. They could see it clearly steaming away from them, growing smaller as they watched it overtake the

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horizon. They could see the backs of people at rest against their cushions. Barnaby's back, too, was visible. He was at the helm, looking due west, heading home. The bill of his cap, tilted up on his head, formed a semi-halo against the sun.

Splashing furiously, Laney began to wave and call.

"Don't bother," Maureen said. "They can't hear us over the motor and no one's looking."

"I don't believe this is happening!"

"Look. Let's get out of the water, get up on the rocks, maybe we'll see a sailboat we can hail," Anna said.

Maureen paddled down the length of the spine, looking for a gentler slope. "This is about the best place."

"Not so easy." Laney struggled to haul herself up, slipped and fell back with a gasp.

"Oh Jesus, you're bleeding!" Maureen found a toehold and heaved herself up out of the water. "Here, grab this." She unclasped the flotation bib and held the tail of it out to Laney.

Anna boosted her from below and after a moment of blind flailing, Laney flopped onto the rock face, followed by a shaken Anna. The three of them perched on their pinnacle, taking stock. Laney's gashed knee continued to drip blood at a constant rate.

"It's not exactly spurting," she said. "But I think we need to stop the bleeding."

Maureen tugged and gnawed at the tube attached to her flotation vest; she was finally able to wrench it free. Under Laney's direction she twisted it around her thigh just above the cut.

"We have to loosen it every ten minutes," Laney directed. "But it's not such of a much, it should stop with this tourniquet."

"Always good to have a resident doctor when you're marooned on a rock pile," Maureen said.

"Somebody will come along soon," Anna soothed. "At the very worst, they'll figure out they forgot us and come barreling back in an hour."

"And if not them," Laney said, "the dope runners ought to come along after dark, wouldn't you think?"

"Where is that package anyway?" Maureen peered down to the cave where they had found it.

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Anna pointed twenty yards out. "There it goes. Floating away on the chop."

"Too bad. We could use a little fix right about now."

"Oh? How would you suggest smoking it?"

"We could just chew some of it," Laney said. "That's what the kids do, after all, lots of times they bake it in brownies. Of course we don't know how pure this batch is or isn't." She shivered.

The sun was still glassy but a cloud bank had moved in from the west. Anna busied herself inflating the other two flotation devices. She spread one out on a relatively flat rock face for Laney to sit on, then propped her knee up on the other one.

"Thanks, love."

"Don't mention it."

"I wonder if one of us could swim for it," Maureen asked, eying the open water.

"It's got to be at least a mile across. And probably some current. Not easy, even with fins," Anna advised.

"I think we need to stay together. Try to stay warm. And alert. And calm." Laney loosened the tourniquet a twist. The bleeding had slowed but started up again. Wordlessly, Anna re-tightened the noose. She knows that Laney is on a daily dose of blood-thinner; three years ago she sustained an embolism in her thigh. She hopes this cut is going, finally, to clot.

"We need to keep our circulation going," Maureen said. "There's no room to run in place, let's at least rub each other's arms and legs." And because it seemed intrusive to apply herself to Laney or Anna, she began briskly slapping her own biceps. She thinks, If they don't find us by dark we could all be in big trouble. A night in the open like this, all of us practically naked. She wonders how long a person can go without water before suffering dehydration. It doesn't seem appropriate to ask Laney this question.

Anna stood up. "I'm going back in."

"Are you crazy? What for?" Maureen asked.

"Going to get the marijuana. It's wrapped in plastic, we could use it to make a windbreak."

"Wait. I'll help."

"You stay with Laney. If I can get it close enough, then you can come down and help me haul it up."

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Maureen squatted beside Laney and inspected the knee. "Does it hurt much?"

"No. I'm a little worried about hypothermia, though. I can't seem to get warm."

"Not in shock?" She took Laney's hand, then began kneading her shoulders and arms.

"Not so far as I can tell. Surprised but hardly shocked."

"Ah yes, the difference between surprise and shock," Maureen said. She is aware that she is babbling, filling spaces as they watch Anna's head and shoulders recede purposefully. "When David was diagnosed as having aplastic anemia I remember thinking, this is like those terrible surprise parties people give, where they turn out the lights and jump out from behind the furniture or out of closets. How I hate those parties! I've never liked being taken unawares."

Great surprises, Laney thinks, are usually tragic. "I was never surprised by Evan's infidelities—he never could keep them secret. So when he asked me for a divorce—to be released from his vows was the way he put it—I was shocked, maybe, but not surprised."

"The shock for me," Maureen said, "was how much David came to resemble my father. Day by day there were the same kindly sunken eyes, the same beard. I finally realized he was almost the age my father was when he died. That was a shocker. Somehow I had never experienced myself as old, I was still sincerely sixteen in the head."

"Well, for me, the cruelest surprise was when Lizzie, our oldest, went over to the anti-abortionists. There she was out chanting, carrying placards, screaming through a megaphone in front of health clinics, my own child! I'm not just surprised—this is no adolescent rebellion, she's thirty-eight, after all—I am flummoxed. An Operation Salvation maven. It's really hard to keep my balance."

"I know what you mean about balance. The first time I was arrested and processed and put in a holding cell I got this weirdly numb feeling, my body felt cold, as if my blood had gone somewhere else, and my mouth felt thick and wooden. I thought, I hope I don't have to speak; my lips won't work."

"Selma?"

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"Actually, it was Boston, at the Navy Yard. We were sitting in, in front of the busses carrying recruits."

"But somehow you always find something to grab hold of."

"Some people hold onto faith or to ambition. I guess the likes of us, we hold onto our version of the truth."

Laney, murmuring assent, hopes this is true. She hopes her cut will stop gushing blood and her body will stop shaking.

They watched Anna's inchworm advance, propelling the bale ahead of her, like a sea cow its calf. When she was close enough, Maureen worked her way down the rock face with both flotation devices and tied the waistbands to the strappings. She braced and hauled while Anna lifted and pushed. The bale was heavier out of water than they had expected. Maureen had to lean back and hold with all her strength while Anna found a way out of the water and clambered alongside.

"Finally!" Anna said, out of breath, as they brought it to the top. Laney meanwhile had gotten on all fours and crawled cautiously along the spiny ridge, scouting for an implement. There were plenty of loose rocks, but nothing with a sharp edge. Then she discovered a pile of jagged conch shells that had been shattered by birds and sorted through them for the best chunks.

"Great!" Anna and Maureen began sawing through the hemp strappings that held the plastic in place.

"This is like trying to butcher a side of beef with a butter knife," Anna said.

"Never mind. Keep it up, it's working!"

The square plastic wrapper, once they succeeded in opening it out, was just big enough for the three of them to huddle under. The redolent marijuana, still a luxuriant green, served as a mattress. They were under cover by the time the usual late-afternoon freshet struck and lay together, flesh against flesh, stunned by the alternate growl of thunder and jabs of lightning visible on all sides.

"Animal warmth," Laney said. "This is how it is in the litter." A little light-headed now, she thinks in a detached way what an adventure they are having. How like Anna to prevail over the elements.

"This is how it was for Prometheus," Maureen said stagily, as

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the sky brightened and darkened around them. "Chained to his rock, baring his liver to the eagle."

"Gives you a little insight into the old myths," Anna agreed. She wonders if Barnaby has noticed yet that they are missing. Even so, she now knows they can hold out through the night, the three of them.

Laney realized she was holding her breath and exhaled slowly. "It's enough to make you a believer." Now she is warm enough to feel her knee throbbing. The cut is still bleeding but not dangerously. If they have to stay here all night she thinks it won't be terrible. Just uncomfortable. She is no stranger to discomfort.

Maureen finds herself almost dozing off, gently warmed by their combined body heat. A rock presses between her shoulder blades but it only causes a small gnawing ache. A smaller ache than grief, tinier than insomnia.

When the brief storm passed, a double rainbow appeared in the west. The sun hovering, just above the horizon, made a postcard appearance.

Something else materialized on that last thin sheet of light, grew larger and larger, and bore down on them, full throttle.

Barnaby was at the helm of a bright little powerboat. Beside him on the shelf, clearly visible through the windshield as he approached, stood three pairs of shoes.

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JOHN HAINES

Age of Bronze

I

Say goodbye to the arm
of the prophet, to the hand
or the fist upheld,
to strike and then to fall;
to the hammer dropped
and the anvil sunken.

To know that what we loved
for so long, the slope
and the shining—desire
in the green flesh
that found in every mortal
gesture a passion multiplied.

II

Then if ever it was morning,
when the saints glittered
in their fiery glass, and out
of holocaust a burnt rose
dropped its petals in the wind.

God was a well in the rock,
an anchor in the cloud.
His stunned avatars,
sleeve-worn, heavy of purse,
watered the altar wine
and snuffed the candles;

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the Magi and the oxen, driven
to forage in the feedlots,
and not long after,
the chapel windows blinked
through the arc of shellfire,
and the belltower fell.

III

A great spider of tin has landed.
Deliberate, humming an arid tune,
he grips the field, then
strings his netting in the sun.

Prophet of no faith but that
of dew and metal in the grass,
he glitters as he knots
his lesson, cryptic and true:

When the age of bronze is over,
the day of smoke begins.

1985–92

Tondo of Hell

Everything we can think of to name
is encircled here, bound
with the darkened and rolling sun
to the wheel of a wayward wagon.

A bonfire raging in the distance
reminds us that our days
are brief and given to thirst,
and death by hanging consoles us
for the little luck we had.

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High on a slope beneath the gallows
Christ and his fugitive apostles
are sprawled and casting lots . . .

And as their idle custom proves,
so an ill wind blows
from the rotting thief.

And everything within and without
is turning—these flamelit episodes
in which we are audience,
actors, and substance . . .

Slowly revolving,
the wheel of death in life
turning the mirrors of Wrath,
of Lust, Envy, and Pride,
to what remains of light on earth.

Hell has no exit—
not through the smoke ring
nor the fire door,
and not in the black wake
of the Arch-Priest
dissolving himself in ink.

And though we smirk and laugh
and pinch each other
in the grand, commiserable joke,

out of the din of agony
comes another, more sodden
sound: the buttocks
of the slothful beaten hard
with a four-foot spoon.

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Night

Do not wake me, for I am not ready
to speak, to break the spell
fixed in these sleeping stones.

Go quietly here. Whisper to wise men
what you cannot speak aloud.
Quiet the metal of doors.

It is the time of earth-changes,
of vanishing rainfall,
and the restless barking of dogs.

Divided is the man of hidden
purpose, and evil his redemption.

Harness the wind and drive the water,
you that govern,
who yoke and stride the world . . .

And then be still.

Leaves of the one standing tree
fall through the twilight;
the nightborn images rise, the owl

in the mask of the dreamer wakes:
Who is the guest?
Who is it who knocks and whispers?

As one calmed in his death-dream
would never return
to this hunted world—

one more key to the clockwork
that drives the stunned machine,
another cry under the wheel . . .

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But calmed and stationed aloft,
delight in his distance,
to see on the star-pavilions

the bright, imperial creatures rise,
ascend their thrones, rule
and prosper. The thrones darken,

earth in the moon-shadow fails,
and he alone in that cold
and drifting waste keeps alight

memorial constellations . . .

So I in this quiet sleep of stone
can say to you: Leave to me
this one sustaining solace—

my night that has more night
to come. To the sun that has set,
whose dawn I cannot see . . .

Mute in my transformation,
and do not wake me.

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X. J. KENNEDY

The Ballad of Fenimore Woolson and Henry James

Constance Fenimore Woolson,
Expatriate in middle years,
Had to tilt her head to listen
Through the keener of her shell-pink ears.

Uncle Jim had created Leatherstocking,
But a true bluestocking was she
And her fiction of artist-heroines
Left her free to live fancy-free.

Women writers, she knew, in retired shade grew
While the sun shone on male scribes' names;
Still, a glimmer of admiration grew
Between her and Henry James.

Now a diffident hat-tilt from Henry
Might fend off her loneliness,
But Henry was already wedded, it seemed,
To his ethical consciousness.

Down the twilit Strand, not quite hand in hand,
Folded handkerchiefs on their wrists,
They sidestepped drunks and Victorian punks
And the placards of anarchists.

On a steam train chugging to Stonehenge,
Asked Fenimore, "Were you a druid,
Henry, would your granite dagger
Scatter my vital fluid?"

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"Why," said Henry, "you obstinate pagan!
Do you crave such a sanguine feast?
I'd hardly know whom to sacrifice you to,
For an artist is his own high priest."

One evening as Fenimore went strolling
Near Hyde Park, rioting mobs
Of the hungry were halting the hansom cabs,
Planting kisses on duchesses' gobs.

Pale Fenimore's heart beat faster
To see such outrages occur.
She walked a way wistfully after the mob,
But nobody halted her.

In her villa in Florence, Henry
Came to stay under Fenimore's roof
Where he, although ever considerate,
Kept distinctly a bit aloof.

Wrote Constance, "Mr. James is coldish,
With a brown beard, taller than John Hay,
And a beautiful regular profile,
Large expressionless eyes, light gray.

"Mr. James would infiltrate me
With his own sense of the past.
He insists I admire the Duomo
But I find it too cold and vast.

"Insufficiently acquainted
With nude torsos, flanks, and the lot,
I can't tell the supremely beautiful
From bare bottoms that are not."

Oh, they'd drive their pens every morning,
Cappuccino for fuel. With sighs
Each labored upon a love scene.
A long lunch, and they'd revise,

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And the sly old cook who attended them
With brandy-breath and prescient leer
Brought Henry brief notes from Fenimore—
Gesú Cristo, quest'Inglesi were queer!

Henry fled. He wrote back to Fenimore
Deft sentiments out of his heart
Signed "faithfully," which, as the weeks went by,
Grew noticeably farther apart.

Fenimore went to the Dolomite Alps,
Stared up at the masses of snow.
She stood in chemise, only ten degrees
In her inn room. Where now to go?

In a palace in Venice, Fenimore
Fell ill with a feverish flu.
She turned and she tossed, she knew all was lost,
And she knew what she needed to do.

Fenimore lurched to the casement,
Flung her left leg over the sill,
Cried, "Lord, if You're watching, forgive me,
But the sum of it all is nil.

"I shall join the eternal mountains,
Be an object of beauty, and then
Have nothing to do with the sorrow
And despair of women and men."

Some passersby kicked at a bundle
Of white rags that uttered moans—
It was Fenimore, eking her life away
On the cold-nosed cobblestones.

Back in London, Henry at high tea
Accepted a wire with the word.
He added a spoonful of sugar to his cup
Though the first he had not yet stirred.

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Henry walked down Great Ormond Street,
He lifted eyes to the air
And asked, "Tell me, my sensibility,
Was there aught of which I wasn't aware?"

But the air, uncomprehending,
Kept silent all the while
Although he had tendered his question
In his earlier lucid style.

Sifting Fenimore's papers, Henry
Came on letters in his own hand
Upon which with speed he set flames to feed
Lest anyone misunderstand.

Henry had a dream: he was running
Through a jungle in desperate haste
Where muffled footfalls drew near, drew near,
And the breath of an unseen beast.

In Rome, at the Protestant Cemetery,
Henry rang at the wrought iron gate,
Sent in his visiting card, ascertained
That his stickpin was stuck in straight.

"Who's there?" whispered Fenimore, rising,
"Who's making that dreadful din?"—
She took one glance at his visiting card
And sent word she wasn't in.

Henry kept standing and standing.
Why, there must be some hideous mistake.
Above him a lowering stormcloud
Relinquished a lonely flake.

He slipped through the gate and beheld it:
The plot where she now dwelled apart,
Where a pride of stray cats came prowling
For a morsel of Shelley's heart,

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Where the broth of the brawling Empire
Seethed under its cloudcover lid
And time had transformed to silver
The absurd old Pyramid

And her newly-placed cross. He would fling him
Like a whipped dog across her grave!
Yet as he drew ready to do so
He knew that such a gesture would save.

Henry went back to his writing desk,
Spread paper like an open chart
And he drew dear Fenimore into his arms
And transformed her to a work of art
Still living,
Transformed her to a work of art.

Author's Note

That the foregoing lines rudely simplify a subtle and complicated history is a fair charge, all the more true if one insists on reading them as strict biography. I have tried only to tell the history starkly, in ballad style, filling in some details (such as Fenimore's forwardness at the Hyde Park riots), omitting others (such as James's second stay in Florence under her roof).

The main events are drawn from Leon Edel's account of the friendship of James and Woolson, and its consequences for James after her death, in *Henry James*, volumes 2 and 3. It is the best account we have, although Edel dismisses Woolson's fiction as "prosy and banal." Dissenting, Cheryl B. Torsney takes a sympathetic view of Woolson's work in *Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Grief of Artistry* (1989), and chides Edel for making the critically and financially successful writer into a stereotype of the rejected woman.

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Torsney argues that Woolson did not die for unrequited love. Whatever the truth, I think it clear that James, in shocked reaction to her death, almost certainly believed that he might have prevented her suicide. Like John Marcher, protagonist of *The Beast in the Jungle* whom "no passion had ever touched," he seems to have blamed himself for inaction: "The escape [from his fate] would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived."

Stanzas 11–13 echo Woolson's letter from Florence in 1880: her impressions of James on first meeting him and touring the city in his company. In fact, six years elapsed between that letter and James's first stay in her Florentine villa. Stanza 20 is based on a journal entry Woolson made on glimpsing the Dolomites shortly before her death. Both documents are given by Clare Benedict in *Constance Fenimore Woolson* (1930). Stanza 31 draws from James's letter of 1907, on his last visit to Woolson's grave in Rome, cited by Edel in the chapter "Pilgrimage" in *Henry James: The Middle Years.* Other dialogue and soliloquies are imaginary.

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JOSEPH FRANK

The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology

1

The Gambler is one of the most engaging, easily accessible and widely read of all of Dostoevsky's works, but it has attracted very little critical attention. One reason for this is certainly that it seemed to offer so few problems. Everyone knew that Dostoevsky was given to compulsive gambling from time to time, and the depiction he gives of the gambler in his story—a young Russian named Aleksey Ivanovich—has been widely accepted as a classic portrayal, now even quoted in psychiatric textbooks. The work has thus been viewed largely in crude biographical terms (with one notable exception that I shall come to later), and critics (except psychoanalytic ones) have largely passed it by with a few patronizing remarks. A recent re-reading, however, has led me to the conclusion that there is much more in the novella than has usually been thought or even suspected. Moreover, *The Gambler* occupies a unique place among Dostoevsky's other works.

This lively novella, knocked off in a month with the stenographic help of the young lady who became his second wife, is the only text of Dostoevsky's that is "international" in the sense of that word made familiar to American readers by a good deal of the fiction of Henry James. It is, in other words, a work in which the conflicts and situations of the characters are a result, not only of their individual temperaments or personal qualities, but also reflect the manner in which their moral-social responses are an interiorization of various national values and ways of life. In Russian literature, there is the German-Russian contrast in *Oblomov*, the French-Russian contrast in *War and Peace*, the Caucasian-Russian contrast in *The Cossacks*. Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, far from being only a brilliant drama-

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tization of one of the problems of his own personal life, belongs with such books in its examination of contrasts between Russian and various European types of character. And it is perhaps the most *timely* of all his works at the present moment, when the Russians are confronting the unprecedented problem of converting their command economy into a market one, because it explores with such wit, humor and tolerant many-sidedness the ambiguities of the Russian attitude towards money—as Dostoevsky saw them, of course. But he knew a good deal about the psychology of his countrymen; and while he has no answer to present problems, he may certainly help us to understand some of their inherent complexities. To justify this exceedingly heterodox view of *The Gambler*, however, let me first give some of the scholarly data concerning it and dispose of the more conventional views.

2

The idea of writing a story about a gambler had occurred to Dostoevsky three years before it was actually undertaken, and he first mentions it in a letter to N. N. Strakhov. "I have in mind," he wrote, "a man who is straightforward, highly cultivated, and yet in every respect unfinished, a man who has lost his faith but *who does not dare not to believe*, and who rebels against the established order and yet fears it." The letter continues:

> The main thing, though, is that all his vital sap, his energies, rebellion, daring, have been channeled into *roulette*. He is a gambler, and not merely an ordinary gambler, just as Pushkin's Covetous Knight is not an ordinary miser . . . He is a poet in his own way, but the fact is that he himself is ashamed of the poetic element in him, because he feels it is despicable, although his need to take *risks* ennobles him in his own eyes. The whole story is the tale of his playing roulette in various gambling houses for over two years.

In the next paragraph, Dostoevsky compares his projected story with *House of the Dead*, which had portrayed convicts for the first time, and explains that he will now do the same for gamblers. He then remarks that, aside from "the fact that

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materials of this type are read with considerable curiosity in our country, gambling at spas, especially where Russian expatriates are concerned, has some (perhaps not unimportant) significance."[1] This last observation, which has been completely neglected, is really of extreme importance; indeed, it provides the chief clue to the interpretation of *The Gambler* that will be offered here.

The circumstances in which this letter was written, however, offer strong support in confirmation of the largely biographical character of the work. In 1863 Dostoevsky was travelling in Europe with his erstwhile mistress Apollinaria Suslova, who was refusing him her sexual favors; and while she was tormenting Dostoevsky with this cat-and-mouse game of advance and withdrawal, she herself was consumed with bitterness and resentment at having just been abandoned by her Spanish lover, a medical student known only as Salvador. Dostoevsky was gambling uninterruptedly during this trip; and it is not difficult to see *The Gambler* as a version of these events. The two main characters are Aleksey Ivanovich, who becomes a confirmed gambler, and his capricious ladylove Polina, who both confides in him at one moment and repulses him the next; the resemblance of these two figures to what we know of Dostoevsky and Suslova could not be more self-evident. That Polina has recently been seduced and abandoned by the suavely treacherous Frenchman de Grieux (Dostoevsky ironically gives him the name of the passionate lover in Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*) only makes the parallel with Suslova more close-fitting.

No one would wish to deny that Dostoevsky used such incidents and situations from his own life to provide the ingredients for his narrative. But the question still remains whether he was really as unambitious as this approach to *The Gambler* assumes. D. S. Savage, in an essay that has become classic, argues quite convincingly that Dostoevsky remained true to himself as a writer in his novella, and that the work "is no mere scandalous revelation of a personal history." On the contrary, it is organized "as is usual in Dostoevsky's works by a dominating and shaping imaginative *idea* to which everything

[1] *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, ed. by Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein (New Brunswick, N. J., 1987), pp. 184–188.

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in the action is related."[2] Savage's article is valuable because it shifts attention away from a narrowly biographical reading of the work, and raises the question of its larger artistic import. Along these lines, he rightfully insists that the gambler himself, a highly intelligent young university graduate, is an unreliable first-person narrator, and that the picture he offers of Polina—a view that has led to her identification with the supposedly "demonic" Suslova—cannot withstand any careful scrutiny.

Aleksey's image of Polina is a woefully distorted one, and Dostoevsky indicates this in numerous (if unobtrusive) ways. The two characters who serve as moral yardsticks (the allegedly moribund old Auntie, a wealthy Russian matriarch who erupts on the scene large as life, and the English lord and wealthy manufacturer Mr. Astley, who shyly courts Polina from a respectful distance), both speak of her in the very highest terms. Their view of her character is totally different from that of the presumably love-struck and frustrated Aleksey, who vehemently maintains that he would throw himself down from the Schlangenberg mountaintop, a local tourist attraction, if she would but give the command. Up to this point, Savage's views are very helpful and useful; but a number of questions arise when we come to his explanation both of the cause of Aleksey's gambling addiction and of his behavior toward Polina.

"Implicit in Dostoevsky's treatment from the beginning," he writes, "is the idea that to the man who, having lost God, is in the process of losing himself, free and responsible choice has been eliminated, so that he is left facing a universe which is subject down to the minutest details to an irreversible deterministic law." Gambling is a revolt against such determinism, similar to the revolt of the underground man, and the soul of the gambler is thus drawn toward "an ultimate irrational and groundless freedom, which, containing equally within itself every possibility, is devoid of the power to actualize any of these possibilities and can give birth only to an ineluctable necessity." Aleksey's love-hate relationship to Polina, in which he feels she

[2] See D. S. Savage, "Dostoevsky: The Idea of *The Gambler*," reprinted in *Dostoevsky: New Perspectives*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1989), pp. 111–125.

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is treating him as a lackey or a "slave," is analyzed in similar terms. "When a limitless egotism, acknowledging no authority and therefore deprived of meaning and value, is brought into an erotic relationship, there results the convulsive lacerations described by Dostoevsky—the writhings of the disintegrating self into the throes of the knowledge of its own nothingness."

Aleksey's "limitless egotism" thus determines the conditions of his infatuation with Polina, and "they meet, not as persons, but as unbounded egos capable of nothing between total domination and absorption of the other, or total and suicidal submission." Polina, on the other hand, strives "toward a relationship of love which is conceivable only when each party ceases to be an ego and becomes a personality in an inward relation to the authority of truth (through faith in God)." Savage thus relies quite literally on Dostoevsky's statement that the gambler-character would be someone who had "lost his faith in God," and he attempts to force the novella into the framework of such an "imaginative idea."

Such a reading, as we see, goes to the opposite extreme of the biographical critics; if they pitch their approach too low, as it were, in my opinion Savage pitches his too high in placing *The Gambler* on the same thematic level as Dostoevsky's major works dealing with questions of religious faith (or lack of such faith). One immediate objection is that not a word in the text can be cited to support his interpretation. Indeed, if we look carefully we find something quite different and a little more complex. When Aleksey steps into a gambling casino for the first time in his life, he writes: "As for my innermost moral convictions, there is no place for them, of course, in my present reasoning [about gambling]. I'll leave it at that. I am saying this to relieve my conscience." Aleksey thus confirms quite clearly that he retains both his "innermost moral convictions" and his "conscience," whose validity he does not question for a moment; he simply sets them aside for the purposes of gambling. There is not a trace of any questioning of the accepted moral code; and this is why he feels the atmosphere of the casino to be "very sordid, somehow, morally rotten and sordid." It can scarcely be a loss of faith in God, from whom this moral code derives, that turns him into a committed gambler.

Again, if lack of religious faith is the cause of gambling, what

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are we to make of the adventures of Auntie, who arrives unpredictably in Roulettenburg and herself promptly begins to gamble uncontrollably until she is wiped out entirely? Why should this sturdy pillar of authentic Russian virtues (including a devotion to religion; she goes home determined to rebuild the local parish church in penance for her gambling sins) behave exactly like Aleksey at the roulette wheel? The appearance of Auntie is usually considered only a comic diversion if any attention is paid to her at all (Savage does not even mention this lengthy episode); but if we accept his view (as I do) that *all* the important incidents of a Dostoevsky work are controlled by an "imaginative idea," then an "idea" for *The Gambler* allowing for such a lacuna can hardly be considered satisfactory.

If there is no textual evidence whatever (quite the contrary) to support Savage's widely accepted reading, there is, on the contrary, a good deal of space taken up with discussions of various types of national character, and the Russian type is continually set against that of others (French, German, English). Even more, Dostoevsky offers, through the utterances of both Aleksey and Mr. Astley, a perfectly forthright explanation for Aleksey's gambling (as well as for Auntie's). "Roulette," Aleksey says, "is simply made for Russians"; and in the last chapter Mr. Astley, who speaks here as an authorial surrogate, confirms Aleksey's opinion. By this time Aleksey has become a congenital gambler, and Mr. Astley sees him as typical: "It seems to me that all Russians are like that, or are disposed to be like that." Oddly enough, Savage does not comment on such passages at all, nor has anyone else, so far as my knowledge goes, paid them much attention; yet we must assume that Dostoevsky meant them to be taken seriously. And if it seems dubious that Aleksey's regrettable fate can be attributed to a loss of faith in God, then perhaps we should look more carefully at what *is* said about it by Dostoevsky so specifically and frequently.

What happened, it seems to me, is that by the time he got around to writing *The Gambler*, Dostoevsky substituted an ethnic-psychological "imaginative idea" for his initial conception of a character who had "lost his faith." His letter, as we have noted, mentions as an afterthought that the gambling of Russian expatriates "has some (perhaps not unimportant) sig-

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nificance"; and this significance becomes the focus of his novella. Of great importance too is the comment about the gambler being "a poet in his own way," who "is ashamed of the poetic element in him . . . although the need to take *risks* ennobles him in his own eyes." Dostoevsky explains this idiosyncratic notion of "poetry" by a reference to Pushkin's Covetous Knight, who amasses a fortune, not for the sake of the money itself, but solely for the psychological sense of power it enables him to acquire over others. "Poetry" in this Dostoevskian sense means acting, not in terms of immediate material self-interest or for the gratification of any fleshly material desire, but rather solely to satisfy a powerful craving of the human personality in some way (whether for good or evil). The underground man in Part I of that work would thus be a "poet" because he acts *contrary* to any rational idea of self-interest and only for the sake of preserving the right to exercise his free will—which means to keep alive his power of psychic self-affirmation. Aleksey's "poetry" is of another kind, but it also springs from the same impulse to assert his personality against conditions in which it is being stifled.

3

The characters in *The Gambler* break down easily into two groups: there are the Russians and the Europeans; and they are contrasted along lines that may be described, to use Dostoevsky's own category, as "poetic" and "non-poetic." Among the Europeans are the fake (or exceedingly dubious) Count or Marquis de Grieux and his supposed cousin, Mlle. Blanche de Cominges; her presumably noble origins are quite clearly sham, and she is in fact a high-priced *cocotte*. Both of these French figures are linked with the lives of a Russian family, that of the widowed General Z—(his family name is given only in a garbled form), who lives in a grand patriarchal style, squandering money right and left, though he has given promissory notes to de Grieux on all his Russian estates in return for loans and is in fact completely in the latter's power. The sensual and provocative Mlle. Blanche would also clearly love to improve her social position by becoming *madame la générale*; and as long

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as the smitten General is in funds, she allows him to pay his court. All the hopes of the General depend on Auntie, presumably on her deathbed, whose momentarily expected demise will pour a considerable fortune into the General's lap. Even after paying off his debts, he would still remain an extremely wealthy Russian *barin*; and what de Grieux has not taken will be left to Mlle. Blanche.

Both de Grieux and Mlle. Blanche are thus moved by exclusively mercenary motives (though the latter has a few upsurges of sentimental generosity); and Mlle. Blanche's relation to the General is paralleled by that of de Grieux to Polina, the General's stepdaughter. He had seduced her earlier in the belief that she was a wealthy heiress; but he has become increasingly cool as the General's financial prospects grow dimmer. Unlike the aging General, who is deeply and genuinely smitten (this is *his* way of being a "poet"), Polina no longer has any illusions about de Grieux. "The moment he finds out that I, too, have inherited something from her [Auntie]," she tells Aleksey, "he will immediately propose to me. Is that what you wanted to know?" The only other important foreign character is Mr. Astley, an exemplar, it is true, of all the gentlemanly virtues, but also the partner in a sugar refining firm and thus limited by his English world of prosaic practicality and common sense.

The Russian characters, on the other hand, are all moved by feelings whose consequences may be practically disastrous but which in every case are sympathetically human even in their very excess. Both the General and Polina have been stirred by love, and Polina has now transferred her affections to Aleksey—though he is too self-absorbed and self-preoccupied to understand that her presumed coldness would dissolve in an instant if he did not continually insist on his slavish subservience to her supposed tyranny. What obsesses Aleksey is the sense of his own social inferiority as a humble tutor in the General's household; despite his culture, education and status as a Russian nobleman, he is treated little better than a servant. He *is* treated outrightly as a servant by the de Grieux-Mlle. Blanche tandem as well as by the hotel staff, and he totally misunderstands Polina because he believes that she looks down on him for the same reasons. He cannot possibly imagine that

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she might favor him over her two other much more imposing suitors, de Grieux and Mr. Astley, and exhibits a rankling resentment to which she responds in kind. "To be sure," Aleksey admits, "our relationship has had a strange beginning. Some time ago, in fact, quite some time ago, maybe two months back, I had noticed that she was trying to make me her friend, her confidant, and that she was actually sounding me out. For some reason [?] it did not work out at the time, and instead, there remained this present, strange relationship of ours . . ." The "reason" was simply Aleksey's ineradicable conviction that Polina could not but regard him with contempt because of his menial social position.

Even before arriving, Aleksey had been convinced that "something would happen to me in Roulettenburg, that there would be something, quite without fail, that would affect my destiny radically and definitively." Roulette would thus change his life, and he explains how to Polina when she inquires what the "object" of such a change could be. "Nothing more," he replies, "than that with money I'll be a different man, even for you, and not a slave." Aleksey thus counts on roulette to enhance his social status, and, in lifting him from his inferior social position, allow him to compete for Polina. When she accuses him, quite justly, of counting on "buying me with money," he rejects such an idea with indignation. But her reply hits the nail on the head: "If you aren't thinking of buying me, you certainly think you can buy my respect with money." The climax of their relation will turn exactly on this issue, when, though for different reasons, Aleksey's behavior toward Polina parallels that of de Grieux.

Aleksey begins to gamble with Polina's money and on her behalf, since it would be unseemly for her to set foot in the casino. He wins, but feels constrained by his obligation to her and leaves when "I felt overcome by a strange and unusual feeling which I found unbearable." It is only the second time, when he plays for himself, that he is really bitten by the gambling fever. After winning a considerable amount "in five minutes or so," instead of quitting—which he would have done if obtaining money had been his genuine goal—"some kind of strange sensation built up in me, a kind of challenge to fate, a kind of desire to give it a flick on the nose, or stick out my

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tongue at it." He bets all his winnings, loses, bets again with the remainder of his funds and is wiped out entirely. The psychic desire to challenge fate, his sudden act of defiance in total disregard of self-interest so far as money is concerned, gives rise to the "strange sensation" that he could not (and did not wish to) control.

Aleksey's losses soon become common knowledge, and lead de Grieux to remark to his face, "caustically and spitefully," that "Russians were . . . lacking in talent even in gambling." It should be mentioned that Aleksey has previously been shown to be an ardent Russian patriot, who vigorously defends his country's very unpopular policies against European (French and Polish) critics (the time of *The Gambler* is set just after the suppression of the Polish rebellion of 1863–65). At first, nonetheless, he seems to agree with de Grieux's insulting observation; but then he turns this denigration around into an encomium of the Russian refusal to dedicate life entirely to the accumulation of wealth. "Roulette is simply made for Russians," Aleksey declares, because "the faculty of amassing capital has become, through a historical process, virtually the main point in the catechism of the virtues and qualities of civilized Western man." Russians have never learned to revere such amassing of capital as an end in itself; but since they need money too, they "are very fond of, and susceptible to, methods such as, for example, roulette, allowing one to get rich suddenly in two hours, and without work. And since we gamble to no purpose, and also without real effort, we tend to be losers!" But then Aleksey immediately transforms these seemingly uncomplimentary admissions into a tribute. "Really, who can tell which of the two is more repulsive," he replies to a rebuke from the General, "Russian shapelessness and lack of discipline or the German method of saving money by honest work."

From the tirade that follows, in Dostoevsky's best vein of satirical grotesquerie, it is quite clear which of the two Aleksey finds more repulsive. For he declares roundly that "I would much rather spend my whole life in a Kirghiz nomad's tent . . . than worship the German idol." This "German idol" is caricatured in imagery taken from the pastoral-idyllic strain of German literature (i.e., Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*). "They have here, in every house, a *Vater*, who is extremely virtuous

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and extraordinarily honest . . . Every such *Vater* has a family, and in the evening they read instructive books aloud to each other. Elms and chestnut trees rustle over the little house. Sunset, storks on the roof, and all of it is so extraordinarily poetic and touching . . ." But the honest *Vater* keeps his family "in a condition of complete servitude and submission," and "they all work like mules and they all save money like Jews." The daughter is denied a dowry and dies as an old maid; the younger son is "sold for a soldier"; the oldest docilely waits to marry until he has acquired enough gulden, and leads his Amalchen to the altar with "her chest dried up and her nose red." This appalling display of rectitude and virtue goes on for several generations, the family grows as rich as "Baron Rothschild, or Hoppe & Co.," but for Aleksey, "I'd much rather indulge in debauchery Russian style, or make my fortune at roulette." The reason simply is that "I am [not] willing to consider my person as a necessary accessory to capital."

4

Aleksey thus links the Russian passion for roulette to an essential aspect of the Russian character, with its refusal to trim down all the needs and desires of the personality simply to a piling up of wealth. One might be inclined to interpret Aleksey's peroration merely as a clever riposte to de Grieux's withering disdain; but Dostoevsky meant it to be taken as more than just another instance of Aleksey's nationalistic rambunctiousness. This is evident from the quite diverting episode involving Auntie (also called Grandmother), who, instead of expiring on schedule in Moscow, explodes unexpectedly on the Roulettenburg scene and sends all the hopes pinned on acquiring her fortune flying out the window. The blunt old matriarch, despotic and highhanded but fundamentally humane and kind-hearted, represents the traditional down-to-earth virtues of the Russian gentry when unspoiled by any truckling to foreign tastes and fashions. She instantly sees through de Grieux and Mlle. Blanche, calls the first a "mountebank" and the second an "actress," takes an instant liking to Mr. Astley, and is kind to both Polina and Aleksey. Her commanding

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presence inspires immediate respect and deference, and even the imposing Oberkellner of the fashionable hotel, used to receiving the best European society, is overawed.

Auntie's behavior, so far as gambling is concerned, provides a textbook illustration of Aleksey's ethnic-psychological theory concerning the Russian attraction to roulette. Curious to investigate this European pastime, she visits the casino and cannot believe her ears when Aleksey explains how much it is possible to win on certain stakes. Instantly tempted by the prospect of such a miraculous and seemingly effortless enrichment, she hardly listens to Aleksey's warning that the odds are "thirty-six to one" against winning and promptly begins to play. What takes over in Auntie is the imperious pride of someone used to command and being obeyed, the pride of a Russian landowner all-powerful on her estates. " 'There, look at it,' Grandmother said angrily, 'how long will I have to wait until that miserable little zero comes up. For the life of me, I'm not going until that miserable little zero comes up!' " It finally does, and Auntie is hooked. She wins a large sum and returns to the hotel in triumph; but when she comes back to the tables, the disaster that everyone foresees inevitably occurs. Possessed entirely by the need to impose her will on the velleities of the wheel, she loses heavily, stubbornly cashes all her securities at a ruinous rate to continue to play, and only stops when she has lost every penny. A loan from Mr. Astley is necessary to enable her to limp contritely home to Russia.

Two other aspects of this Auntie episode are thematically important. Even before beginning to gamble herself, Auntie's attention is caught by a young man in the midst of a winning streak, whose "eyes were flashing and his hand trembling. He was already making his bets quite aimlessly, just putting down what he could grab with his hand, yet he kept winning and winning, raking in more and more money." Auntie wishes to tell him to stop, but is warned not to raise her voice: "What a shame! The man is lost!" She also sees another gambler, well known to Aleksey, who comes every day between one or two o'clock, places her bets "quietly, coolly and calculatingly," and wins considerable sums before leaving after one hour. On learning that this methodical gambler was a Frenchwoman, Auntie comments: "Ah, one can tell a bird by its flight. This one

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has sharp claws. You can see that." The nationality of the young man is not given, but he is, so to speak, a "poetic" gambler in the Russian style, whose will is not controlled solely by a desire for money. Auntie, of course, will go the same way as the young man, winning for a time but doomed to lose everything.

The "young man" here foreshadows the fate both of Auntie and Aleksey; and the change that occurs in Auntie when *she* temporarily becomes a gambler foreshadows the dénouement of the Aleksey-Polina romance. On her first visit to the casino, Auntie embarrasses everyone by insisting on entering its august precincts accompanied by her majordomo Potapych and her peasant maid Marfa. "So she is a servant, so I have to leave her behind!" she retorts to the General's warnings about propriety. "She is a human being too, isn't she . . . How could she go anywhere, except with me?" Later, when her gambling fury has taken over, she loses all concern for Marfa, and snappishly dismisses her when she devotedly begins to escort her mistress again. "Why must you drag along! I can't take you with me every time. Go back home!" Once the passion for gambling gains the upper hand, which means the passion of her will to dominate, all of Auntie's kindlier instincts and genuine fellow feeling simply vanish.

5

On a much higher level of emotive complication, exactly the same situation occurs as a result of the crisis created by Auntie's appearance and departure. It is clear that she will not give a cent to the General and that she is very much alive; de Grieux thus announces his intention to leave for Russia and claim the General's property. At the same time, he sends a letter to Polina explaining ceremoniously that he must renounce all further hopes for *their* future, but that, as a man of honor, he would turn over fifty thousand francs to the General on her behalf. Aleksey finds her sitting in his room that night, and realizes that this could only mean one thing. "Why that meant that she loved me! She came to see *me* and not Mr. Astley. She, a young girl had come alone to my hotel room, meaning that she had compromised herself before everybody, and I, I was just

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standing there, refusing to understand it!" How he might have behaved is indicated the next day by Mr. Astley, who remarks acidly that "she [Polina] was on her way here yesterday, and I should have taken her to a lady relative of mine, but as she was ill, she made a mistake and went to you." Instead of thinking first of how to protect his presumed beloved, Aleksey rushes off to play roulette and win the fifty thousand francs necessary for Polina to wipe out de Grieux's insult. Nothing had changed in their relations, and he still behaved as though it were necessary to "buy her respect."

At the casino, Aleksey hits a sensational winning streak, playing frantically and frenziedly in the "Russian" style—"haphazard, at random, quite without thought." As his luck continues to hold, "now I felt like a winner *and was afraid of nothing, of nothing in the world*, as I plunked down four thousand on black" (italics added). The pall of social inferiority that had been the bane of his life so far is thus lifted, and he was "experiencing an overwhelmingly pleasurable feeling" from "sweeping up and taking in the banknotes." Losing all recollection of why he had come, "I don't remember whether I thought of Polina even once in all this time," but "I remember distinctly how all of a sudden a terrible craving for *risk* took possession of me, quite apart from any promptings of vanity," and he staked on what seemed to be impossible odds solely to satisfy this craving. His hitherto crushed personality is freed from its crippling limits, and he loses consciousness of everything except the intoxication of this release. He breaks off play only when the voices of onlookers suddenly awaken him to the extent of his winnings; otherwise he would have continued to play until his luck turned and he had lost everything.

Just as he had forgotten Polina while playing, so now, on his way back to her, she scarcely looms any larger on his emotive horizon. What dominates is "a tremendous feeling of exhilaration—success, triumph, power—I don't know how to express it. Polina's image flitted through my mind also . . . Yet I could hardly remember what she had told me earlier, and why I had gone to the casino . . ." As he enters the room, Aleksey notices "Polina's terribly intent gaze as she looked at me without moving from her seat or even changing her position." When his first words concern the problem of how best to safeguard the

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pile "of banknotes and rolls of gold," she looks at him "with a strange expression on her face . . . I would not be wrong if I said there was hatred in it." A bit later, after Aleksey offers to take the fifty thousand francs and return them to de Grieux "first thing in the morning," she suddenly bursts into laughter. "This laughter of hers was a lot like the sarcastic laughter I had heard so often, even recently, every time I made one of my passionate declarations to her." Polina had not believed such declarations in the past, and Aleksey's behavior now only confirms her suspicions: his so-called "love" had more to do with the frustrations of his ego than with *her*.

It is at this moment, when Polina realizes that Aleksey's attitude is not really different from that of de Grieux—both men assume, one naively and unreflectingly, the other cynically, that her innermost feelings can be compensated for by money—that her ulcerated pride and dignity bring on a crisis of hysteria. Only then does Aleksey become aware that "something had happened to her in my absence, she seemed quite out of her mind." Turning on him with the detestation of despair, she says bitterly "I won't take your money," and then reveals the full truth of her affair with de Grieux. "'You are giving too much,' she said with a laugh, 'de Grieux's mistress is not worth fifty thousand francs.'" Polina then breaks down completely, alternating between embracing and caressing Aleksey and holding him at arm's length to scrutinize him with mistrust. The pathos of her condition is amply indicated, in the midst of her delirium, by her recurring question to Aleksey as she "put her hands on my shoulders, again giving me that intent look and saying over and over again: 'You love me . . . love me . . . will you love me?'"

Unable to master himself sufficiently to come to the aid of a suffering Polina no longer responsible for her own actions, Aleksey yields to the combined temptation of her crazed caresses and his newly acquired sense of strength and mastery: he spends the night with her in his room. On waking, she looks at him "with infinite loathing" and asks for the fifty thousand francs. On being assured they were hers, she flings them in his face, as she had wished to do with de Grieux, and runs out of the room to take refuge with Mr. Astley. Aleksey is still puzzling over this event in his manuscript, written a month after it had

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occurred, and his pretended lack of comprehension (really a guilty self-deception) is reminiscent of the underground man's self-excuses for his mistreatment of the prostitute Liza who had come to him for help. "To be sure it all happened in a delirious state, and I knew it too well, and . . . yet I refused to take that fact into consideration." But then he reconsiders: "Why, she wasn't all that delirious and all that ill as to be totally oblivious of what she was doing when she came to me with de Grieux's letter, or was she? So it must be she knew what she was doing." What Polina certainly *did* know was that Aleksey's love had not been strong enough, non-egoistic enough, to resist taking sexual advantage of her deranged and helpless condition.

6

What occurs at this point, when Aleksey goes off with his winnings to Paris in the company of Mlle. Blanche, has been found by some commentators to be quite unconvincing. "The act confounds us," the usually very helpful Edward Wasiolek has written, "and seems unprepared for in any way."[3] Well, in the first place Aleksey's initial description of Mlle. Blanche strongly suggests that he is far from being impervious to her well-displayed attractions. Moreover, the prescient Mr. Astley, "in a tone as if he were quoting information from a book," has no doubt about Aleksey's destination: "All Russians, when they have some money, go to Paris!" Aleksey will follow the usual Russian path and kick up his heels in Paris, but Dostoevsky motivates him a little more individually all the same. Mlle. Blanche is not lacking either in psychological acumen or a smattering of education, and she propositions the newly-affluent Aleksey with a quotation from Corneille's *Le Cid* asking him if he has the courage to dare. Since his personality is still under the spell of the psychic afflatus provided by his gambling exploit, he goes off with her on the spot. "I can't say I felt very

[3] See his introduction to *Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Gambler*, trans. by Victor Terras, ed. by Edward Wasiolek (Chicago, 1972), p. xxxv. I have used this translation for my quotations from the text.

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cheerful," he confesses, "but, since the previous day, I had been conditioned to risking everything on one card."

The Paris pages of *The Gambler* are more or less a blur of impressions similar to the scenes in *A Nest of Gentlefolk* during which the frivolous and unfaithful wife of an idealistic gentry-landowner plunges him into the Parisian social maelstrom as a sickened spectator. Mlle. Blanche is honest enough in her own way, and, while spending Aleksey's money hand over fist, does not neglect to pay attention to him occasionally. To take up the slack, she introduces him to a friend Hortense whose nickname is *Thérèse-philosophe*—the title of a well-known eighteenth-century pornographic novel. Presumably Hortense kept Aleksey amused and occupied, and he admits to having no complaints. He does, though, become terribly bored at Mlle. Blanche's parties, where he is forced to play host to the dullest businessmen with newly minted fortunes, insolent and ignorant military types, and "a bunch of wretched minor authors and journalistic insects" with "a vanity and conceit of such proportions as would be unthinkable even back home in Petersburg—and that is saying a great deal!" How Aleksey might have known this is not clear; but Dostoevsky was certainly in a position to make such a comparison. The escapade is over, and Aleksey sent on his way, once all his money—to which he displays a total indifference (*"un vrai Russe, un calmouk!"* Mlle. Blanche says admiringly)—has been dissipated, much to the benefit of Mlle. Blanche's social prestige.

The main story of *The Gambler* ends with this episode, and a final chapter, set down a year and eight months later, provides a sort of commentary. Aleksey has now become an addicted gambler, travelling around Europe and picking up odd jobs as a flunkey until he can scrape together enough money to return to the tables. He has become completely dependent on the "strange sensation" afforded by gambling, the thrill that enables him to affirm his identity and triumph momentarily over his gnawing sense of inferiority. Remembering one of his winning moments, he writes: "I now had seventeen hundred gulden, and this in less than five minutes! Yes, it is at moments like this that one forgets all one's earlier failures. Why, I had got this at the risk of more than life itself. But I had dared to risk it, and there I was once again, a man among men!"

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Nonetheless, he also feels that "I have grown numb, somehow, as though I were buried in some sort of mire." This feeling was particularly aroused in him by a supposedly accidental meeting with Mr. Astley; in fact, one carefully arranged for the sake of Polina.

Auntie has died meanwhile, and left Polina a comfortable inheritance; she had been keeping a protective eye on Aleksey all this time, and once secretly arranged to pay his bail for a bad debt. Mr. Astley has been sent to see if Aleksey has changed in any way, and discovers that he is much the same—if not worse. Aleksey is still convinced that Polina is really in love with de Grieux because, like all Frenchmen, "he's got elegance of form, Mr. Astley, and the young lady [especially Russian ones] takes that form for his own soul, for the natural form of his heart and soul, and not for what it is: an external garment, which has come to him by inheritance." As for himself, "I am simply a small-time gambler at roulette," and how could he (or for that matter Mr. Astley) compete with de Grieux cast as Apollo Belvedere.

At this Mr. Astley explodes with anger, and reveals to Aleksey, not only that he had come to see him expressly on Polina's behalf, but that it was Aleksey she had loved all along. Even more, "what's worse, even if I were to tell you that she still loves you, why, you would stay here just the same! Yes, you have destroyed yourself. You had some abilities, a lively disposition, and you are not a bad man. *In fact, you might have been of service to your country, which needs men so badly* . . . [italics added] I am not blaming you. It seems to me that all Russians are like that, or are disposed to be like that. If it isn't roulette, it's something else but similar to it . . . You are not the first who does not understand what work is (I'm not talking of your plain people). Roulette is preeminently a Russian game."

Aleksey himself had said much the same thing earlier in his rejection of the "German idol"; but now Mr. Astley shows the obverse side of this refusal to discipline the personality in some way and to harness it to achieving a desired result. The "poetic" character of the Russian personality can lead both to personal disaster and, if left to operate unchecked, to the obliteration of all sense of civic or moral obligation. Aleksey apparently wants to take this lesson to heart, and with the ten louis d'or left him

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at parting by Mr. Astley, who embraces him with warmth before leaving, thinks of gambling in a new way for the first time. "Yes, all it takes is to be calculating and patient just once in a lifetime—that is all! All it takes is to keep control of yourself just once, and your whole life will be changed in an hour!" This last phrase, however, betrays the old, incorrigibly Russian Aleksey; and what he remembers in the last paragraph is the exhilaration he had felt once when he bet the small sum he had been saving for dinner and won one hundred and seventy gulden. "And what if I had lost heart that time, if I had not dared to take that chance . . . " He will, it appears, continue to gamble in the "Russian" style.

7

If one reads *The Gambler* from this ethnic-psychological point of view, for which there is ample warrant in the text, then it may be seen to have a very special place in Dostoevsky's work. It is the one and only creation in which his view of the Russian national character, which appears sporadically here and there (most notably, but not exclusively, in his journalism), provides him with an artistic and thematic focus.[4] Disorderly and "unseemly" though the Russian character may be, it still has human potentialities closed to the narrow, inhuman, Philistine, penny-pinching of the Germans; the worldly, elegant and totally perfidious patina of the French; and even the solidly helpful but unattractively stodgy virtues of the English. "For the most part," as Aleksey remarks to Polina, "we Russians are so richly endowed that we need genius to evolve our own code of manners. And genius is most often absent, for, indeed, it's a rarity at all times. It's only among the French and perhaps some

[4] See, for example, Razumikhin's remarks in *Crime and Punishment* (Part 2, Chap. V), in which he is speaking about the recent growth of crime among the Russian educated class. "Well, what did that Reader [an academic title] of yours in Moscow answer when he was asked why he had counterfeited the tickets? 'Everybody else gets rich by various means, and we wanted to get rich too as quickly as we could' . . . The idea was to do it at other people's expense, as quickly as possible, *and without labor.* [italics added] They were used to having everything found for them, to being in leading-strings, to being spoon-fed.'" The translation is that of Jessie Coulson in the W. W. Norton edition (1975).

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other Europeans that the code of manners is so well defined that one may have an air of dignity and yet be a man of no moral dignity whatever."

Even if Russians have not yet worked out their own code of manners, however, and the dangers of such a lack have become quite obvious, they can only demean themselves by attempting to imitate any of the European models. For all his weaknesses, Aleksey arouses sympathy both because of his honesty about himself (except in the case of his night with Polina, which she has obviously forgiven), and because of his unerring eye and refreshing disrespect for the hypocrisies, pretensions and falsities by which the Europeans cover up their own shortcomings. One of the most amusing episodes, which can be mentioned only in passing, involves Aleksey's "insult" to the insufferably pompous German Baron and Baroness; he refuses to apologize, and ties everybody into knots by pretending to insist on the punctilio of the European gentlemanly code of *politesse* and *point d'honneur*. There is an engaging brashness and sincerity about him that wins the friendship of all the "positive" characters (Polina, Auntie, Mr. Astley), and Dostoevsky certainly hoped the reader would share some of their sentiment. Nor was he perhaps meant to be seen as *entirely* a lost man. On learning that Mr. Astley had been sent by Polina, "'Really, Really!,' I exclaimed, as tears came gushing from my eyes. I just could not hold them back. I believe that it was the first time in my life this had happened." Such tears may presage something for the future, and they surely indicate a depth of feeling of which the earlier Aleksey had been incapable; but whether this is to be taken as a hint of possible recovery may be left undecided.

Having rejected a simplistic biographical view of *The Gambler* at the beginning of this essay, I should now, all the same, like briefly to return to the question of the relation of the novella to Dostoevsky's life. Works of art are never mere transcriptions of personal experience, but this does not mean that they have no relation to a writer's biography; they enter into symbiosis with it in manifold and intricate ways, and if literary biography has any justification at all except curiosity, it is because it may better help us to understand some of these mysterious interconnections. Certainly Dostoevsky utilized his own sensations as a

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gambler in this work, and it may be considered both as a self-condemnation and an apologia at the same time. Clearly, it must have been some consolation to believe, as he probably did, that his own losses, which almost always resulted from a failure to stop playing in time, were the consequence of a national Russian trait carried to excess and not simply a personal defect of character. He was, after all, a "poet" both in the literal and symbolic senses of that word; and if his "poetry" led to unhappy outcomes when he gambled, it was, nonetheless, proof that he found it impossible to subordinate his personality to the flesh-god of money, before whom, as he had written in *Winter Notes*, all of Western civilization was now lying prostrate. He lost materially, but in some sense he gained a psychological reassurance from his very losses.

Dostoevsky never gambled except when he went abroad, and there is more than a suggestion that the fate of Aleksey is tied up with his expatriation. Auntie can return to a solidly rooted Russian life, sadder but wiser after her fling, but Aleksey's uprootedness throws him back on gambling as the only means of expressing his identity in the face of a world he despises. Mr. Astley says he would gladly give Aleksey a thousand pounds on the spot if he were sure he would quit gambling and return to Russia; the implication seems to be that one is tied up with the other. In life, Dostoevsky resembled Auntie much more than Aleksey; and it is worth remarking that, though *The Gambler* had already been written and published, Dostoevsky's most prolonged and disastrous periods of gambling occurred when he was *forced* to live abroad in 1867–1870. If he had gone back to Russia, he would have been thrown into debtors' prison; and the hope of winning enough to return home was his (at least ostensible) major motive. He gambled most desperately, we might say, to be able to escape from the exile that invariably led him into gambling.

Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the dialectic relation that can be observed between Dostoevsky's gambling and his creativity. His second wife records in her memoirs that, after a while, she made no objection to his gambling trips because "having convinced himself of the futility of his hope of winning, he would settle down to his novel with new energy and make up

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for all the lost time in two or three weeks."[5] Each time he lost, he returned to his work with renewed vigor and determination; it was as if, having proven to himself that he was too Russian to win at roulette, he decided to put into practice his belief that Russians must learn to discipline themselves through work. Dostoevsky may thus be seen as combining both Aleksey and Mr. Astley in his own personality; and it was his hope for the future that the Russian character might one day embody these two extremes in a more harmonious fusion than it had yet (as he knew only too well) been able to achieve. D. S. Merejkowsky remarked a long time ago—he was writing about the Russian Revolution of 1905—that Dostoevsky was a "prophetic" writer. After reading *The Gambler*, one look at the daily newspapers will prove that this is still true.

[5] Anna Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky, Reminiscences*, trans. and ed. by Beatrice Stillman (N.Y., 1975), p. 165.

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FRANK X. GASPAR

Lamentation

Someone has come
and whacked through the brush

on the side of the hill, and now
a long yellow surveyor's thread
stretches down the swath
that could only have been bulldozed,

so clean and complete are its lines,
so explicit the white lacerations
on the wrist-thick branches that have been piled
into a thatched wall,

and I walk this odd fissure
along the property line
ignored for decades, now an easement,
soon a road:
It is spring
in the fourth year of the drought. Even so,
the year's scant rain on the pastures
has brought up a green silkening

that stretches away to the farthest fences,
and the bright green hooks of the wild cucumber
churn along the shining oak,
and ceanthus bristles, impudent

among the manzanita, the manzanita itself
blooming in delicate puckers
where the bees suck and roll,
starbursts that will soon dry and vanish:
Higher,

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from this hill's flank the quit-claim covenants
of a hundred years show like patchwork
on the valley's soil—fence-lines
and fire-breaks, the avocado groves, oranges,
the wild oaks, the alfalfa,

and lately
the great bruises of the new houses that come
in clusters, that bring work and money,
that advance from the west, pawn
and bishop, thigh by thigh, to gild
the sunlight with their ochre roofs.

In the oldest stories
God gave up the world as a rod
according to which we might perfect ourselves
and move from his silence into his light
even as the barbed wire moves to rust
and the fence-posts wither, and the
mushrooms
send up their last white prayer
from the nave of the ruined log,

but there is no palate here anymore
for the old dialectics of order and chaos:
nothing has prepared us for this harrowing
when the last coyote hangs his tooth
in the poisoned bait,
and the bats diminish to tales
in the holy books,
and the owl flies
to the false lights of the north, and the beetle
and the tarantula dance
in the ravenous sugars of malathion:

And so in this strange year of the early heat
the hills prepare to receive their multitudes
and I climb again, crawling at times, pulling
on the shin-bones of scrub trees

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until the tin roofs of our own outbuildings
show themselves
through the tent of the eucalyptus

all the way down to the pig-iron
of the dead tractor and the mouth in the earth
where the pump-engine
whines for groundwater,

and there in the bright polygon of irrigated grass
and the cluster of apple and peach trees
my wife and her mother
have gone out with a bowl
and from this distance they seem to be gathering
blossoms—

blossoms, the women's shadows
darkening the grass like two long others
moving among them as they reach
their arms into the trees:

It is impossible to catch their words now, tinkling
like the wind-chime, that reach me
only in scattered bits, the voices
tumbled and dissembled,
not easy to tell
what they have walked out to claim
in a season that will bring no fruit.

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Winter Berries

Now it is Christmas in the woods
and the pines are hung with gloomy light,
the black silk on the pond's eye
has clouded in its wax of ice,
and two boys whom I remember
have come to gather red berries
and the boughs of the white pine,
an idea that no one put them up to
although they talk about their mothers
as though such a thing might make
a happiness around the doors of a house,
as though only the women would know
what to do with an armload of red and green:
And it's my friend and I walking
the corrupt ice of the pond until
we see the purple tangle of the winter-berry bush
and the yellow stalks of the dead reeds
and suddenly his legs burst through
in a great crash and gush—up to his knees
in the shallow water, and he curses
and lumbers to shore, smashing a wake
of splintered ice while I, a few feet away
walk as though charmed. Later, sacks filled
with berries and on a dark hill hacking
the bottom-most tender branches of pine,
we see that his brown pants have frozen
and he bends them, makes them crackle
around the instep of his boot. I don't
have to ask if he is cold. His face is
flushed and young and beautiful,
though I would not have said so then,
but now, refracted across so much memory and longing
it darkens any recollection that might follow it:
I know we must have hiked home in the short
winter dusk with our arms full of garland,

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but I don't recall our mothers' greetings
nor can I remember the sprays on the weathered doors
or windowsills, nor the Christmas lights
of that particular year. And the boys,
who have gone forward into the brambles
of what we call *lives*, are gone forever
except for the persistent traces in one
mind or another, never to be trusted, already
passed into the intricate fiction of what is behind.
Longing for what, then? When the sun
draws behind the low hills west of the pond,
the alder still purples, the winter-dead
grasses still bleach in the bone cold: even
though new houses break the clean lines
of thicket, there is a luster that comes up
in moments before the sky gives over
to the waiting stars: no matter how you watch it,
you cannot gauge the precise moment it vanishes,
you cannot be sure what you wanted to rush to
and gather in your arms and save.

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Eucharist

Kneeling at the altar rail,
head back, and the priest and his angels
sliding toward each dry mouth,
gold pyx and incantation
in the rich Latin, air swelling
with unmistakable, absolute presence
so that the walk back to the pew
with the Host fusing to the tongue
was a drunken float, an abeyance
of the small laws of the body,
everything shining in complete
relevance and perspective, the men
stiff and solemn in their awkward clothes,
and the women's faces shining behind
their Sunday veils, the girls
sleepy and bored, and even then
the holiness of their sex lying like
the scent of blossoms in their curved laps
while everything reached to become something else,
some transfigured perfection that had been pledged
to us and that we tried to carry into
the uncertain world when the Mass had ended,
walking down the broad steps among
the gleaming heads and starched hems,
the flat musty taste dissolving,
and the brazen light of morning arcing,
aching under our hungry eyes.

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C. S. GISCOMBE

Ways Over

1. (1959–1988)

I phoned my parents in Dayton the week before I left to say I was bicycling up to North Bay and my father asked did I know that that was where his father's brother had lived. Yes, I said, way *up* in Canada. He countered that it wasn't all that far and told me that we'd once almost driven there, impulsively, when we'd been in Sault Ste. Marie and he'd seen a road-sign for the place that said it was 90 miles away but my mother, he said, had nixed the trip. I hadn't known any of that but I remembered the day—1959 when I was eight and my parents, my sister and I had been staying in a cottage we'd rented near Mackinaw City in Michigan. The drive to Sault Ste. Marie had been a day outing from the cottage, across that strip of the Upper Peninsula and on into Canada—my first ever trip to Canada—over a drawbridge which I recall with almost perfect clarity: we'd had to wait for a boat to get itself past the bridge and 2 or 3 bicyclists had glided by our stopped car, stopping themselves further up in the line of traffic where lowered gates blocked entrance to the part of the roadway that was actually raised. An hour later we were picnicking at a roadside park in Ontario and on a track on a ridge next to us a steam locomotive *sans* train raced by (the last one, aside from tourist excursion items, I ever saw or remember seeing), this also a memory of incredible clarity.

My mother got on the extension and reminded my father that my grandfather had never had anything good to say about his brother. And she reminded me about her considered opinion that long lost relatives should *stay* lost—"If you run into any Giscombes up there," she said, "just don't give them this address." Her tone was jocular but then she was silent, waiting for me to agree to that.

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This was in September of 1988. The day before I was due to leave I was blasting down the hill from Cornell University, where I worked then, on my bike, thinking about North Bay more than the Fiat Spyder that had stopped abruptly in front of me, its driver desiring to let a pretty woman walk across the street in front of him. When I did realize the car wasn't moving it was too late to do anything but slam on the just-adjusted-for-the-trip-to-Canada brakes, skid into his bumper, fly over his trunk, hit Campus Drive and bounce into the far curb. I was on my feet in a second, though, yelling at him about not having brake lights and the pretty woman was yelling at him too, though I think the accident was my fault, whether he had brake lights or not. My shoulder hurt rather badly and I was scraped up and bleeding but was able to ride the rest of the way home, even with the nasty wobble the front wheel had acquired.

By the time I got to our house, though, the ache in my shoulder was getting worse and starting to worry me: the year before, when we'd been living in Britain, I'd broken my clavicle in another cycling accident and though the break had healed quickly—three weeks later I was back, if uncomfortably, on the bike—having it had not been a pleasant experience. I'd known it was broken before I got to the hospital: the pain was intense and, when I'd felt the bone with my fingers, there was an obtuse angle where before it had been straight. This didn't hurt as badly and the clavicle's angle was the same as I'd got used to it being; but the injury was in the same general area and the X-ray technician at the British hospital had told me that broken clavicles were most common of the serious cycling mishaps, that that was, in fact, how she had broken hers. So I was afraid I might have a hairline fracture or one of those hideously subtle things like torn ligaments, things I knew little about. Katharine drove me up to the hospital at the edge of Ithaca where they poured hydrogen peroxide in the cuts and X-rayed my shoulder.

When I was 10, I'd fallen from a grape arbor playing Tarzan, an irony that I didn't see then, and broken both my arms, the left one terribly. Gangrene had set in, as they say, and I lost the arm to that above my elbow, all this the week before Easter, 1961. Thirty years now of prosthetic devices, a 1-Y deferment (though I was in college during Vietnam and no one I knew or

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even knew of in college was ever called), and an inability to play the guitar. And odd, contradictory ideas about mortality since, for a while, the smart money had been on me dying: on one hand I knew that it wasn't how things were on TV, that anyone could in fact cash in at any time, any place. I mean I'd found out: I was in Miami Valley Hospital for some months back then and other kids I knew in the hospital died there. But on the other hand—the one I no longer had—I felt immortal, bullet-proof, for years because of it, because of having gotten closer than most up into the obvious face of death; and I figured that coming back maimed by the experience was enough and that I didn't have to pay anymore. My sister, the psychology Ph.D., would say that this is because I've never known anything about probability.

The doctor in Ithaca was young and eager-to-please, he laughed at my jokes. The X-rays had showed that all was right except—and here he gently manipulated the shoulder, staring off into space, feeling the thing for himself—that it moved with surprising ease, perhaps because of the amputation and the weight of the prosthesis, he said, into and out of dislocation. He shrugged his own shoulders and gave me leave to start for Canada whenever the pain subsided, whenever I felt ready.

I rested for the better part of a week and then got on the road. The first day out was unpleasant and all through it I kept hearing the doctor's words and worrying over them. The second day was awful, a forced march, but the third was better and by the time I ferried across the mouth of the St. Lawrence that evening I had stopped looking back.

2. (May 1970)

I was sitting with a woman on a hillside overlooking a stream excavated into a canal: we were drinking a dollar bottle of sweet wine and discussing whether we were in N.Y., where I was old enough, or Vermont, where I wasn't. Where we were was at a country intersection in a lush system of valleys and rises, the southern foothills of the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains: the one road came in, from someplace called Comstock, on a one-lane bridge over the stream and T'd into US 4, the

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two-lane we'd been traveling on. She was two years older than I was—old enough anywhere—and white, both of which were, for me, off-putting. But there was much about her, certainly, to counteract those or at least challenge them. She was complicated—she probably still is—and I'm sorry we never got beyond a point where all or most settings were, simply, difficult.

To the west, from the south, a train was coming, we heard the diesel horn a mile or so off but clear and sudden over our shoulders: we were both attuned to event or the possibility of event, to any newness which is probably why we were friends, even awkwardly, to begin with. The stream curved at the place where we'd ensconced ourselves in the tall grass and both Rte. 4 and the railroad track just beyond it followed—we'd seen earlier—the same great bend. We went back across the road to the track and jogged north along it keeping an eye over our shoulders but when we got around the bend, or further on into it, the track stopped abruptly, ended in a pile of crossties. We stopped, we looked at each other, strange things apparently afoot, eh? when the horn went again, much closer this time. There was, of course, another track—one we hadn't seen—behind a line of trees and through a break in that line a huge blue and yellow locomotive was stopping, three or four blue and yellow passenger cars behind it. There was nothing around but the dusty dirt road that went up to the lip of the tracks and stopped there and it was down into this road that a pink-faced conductor stepped and placed a footstool so that two Hispanic ladies could step daintily, with his hand at their elbows, off the train: they were dressed in beautifully colored dresses, great dashes and flowers of color, open-toe high heels and summer hats. It was a wild moment there in the middle of nowhere: the train taking off, resuming its trip, myself in my Levis, desert boots, and raggedy shirt along with a white woman dressed more or less the same way and the two Spanish women *them*selves up here in what did turn out to be New York, dusty upstate with the sun beating down on all of us. They asked if we knew where they could get a bus, or maybe they said *the* bus, but we didn't and so they commenced hiking off into the distance, their heels clicking across the bridge, on out of sight.

We were hitchhiking, which I did then with a certain passion, and got eventually that long, long weekend to Montreal, my

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first trip there. We went to an all-day music thing at some stadium on the edge of the city, smoked a lot of hashish, talked very little and had great difficulty getting out of town on the arterials, the hash making it seem less "interesting" than interminable, but by then enough time and adventures had passed so that I was no longer enamored of her or of being on the road and that may have helped too. By dawn, though, the high had worn off completely and we were still within sight of the Cartier Bridge: we were perched, or collapsed, on a guardrail at the edge of some 4-lane and there was no traffic, it being Sunday morning. Finally a provincial cop stopped and buzzed us out to near the border, where another road, more well-traveled, merged with the one we were on. The ride hadn't been an offer, he'd said "Get in" unambiguously and then turned ambiguous in that way cops *have* when I'd asked where he might be taking us: he said "I'll give you a good ride" but I was too worn out to press him and gladly did I accept the real offer which came a second later—his right hand poised over his shoulder holding the opened wide-mouth Canadian pack—of a cigarette.

It's a young person's habit, smoking, a thing for those whose bodies can take abuse without flinching, a thing for people who live more casually than I can now that I'm forty, that age taking the edge off immortality. But that morning I'd been out for hours and to this moment I remember the taste of the one the cop gave me, how I smoked it in my 19-year-old life in the clean backseat of that car that had no door or window handles, no way out. (It was a Player's straight: creamy & crisp & bitter at once.)

My second trip to Canada, my first to Montreal. I don't remember the border crossing either way.

(That's not true. An interracial couple picked us up after the cop dropped us off and we all stopped someplace for coffee, Joan complaining when she came back from the Ladies that no one—meaning, I suppose, me—had told her that her nose was sunburned red, that she looked like a clown, she said. The man was in the Air Force, at the base in Plattsburgh, bigger and somewhat darker than me; the woman was smaller and older than Joan, she looked haggard. They looked an exaggeration of us in some way, some circumstance I figured was less

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difficult, but there's no real reason for me to think that. I remember that they said something in low voices to one another once and then kissed as he was driving and I recall wondering if the man's uniform would get us back in, would get us effortlessly through Customs, given the racial make-up of the car, but it or something absolutely did, which is probably why my memory of the crossing itself is so hazy. We must have stopped after that since I bought a pack of cigarettes from the machine at the diner and I remember that they were L&Ms, a US brand. We all smoked through our coffee and I remember feeling quite comfortable, the first time I'd felt that way in days, but don't recall what we talked about. He got the check for all of us.)

3. (October 1980, September 1988)

By the time I was 28 I'd been off cigarettes for a year and was feeling good enough to become interested in the bicycle I'd bought years ago on impulse during my first week in graduate school. We lived in Ithaca, N.Y. then where riding means riding over very steep hills and soon I was able to do it, to make it all around town without stopping, taking a pleasure in my body I'd not had in the 20 or so years since I'd lost my arm. I think I'd rediscovered, or simply discovered, the possibility of physical grace and in the spring of my 29th year I figured it was time to try bicycle touring since it combined that new grace with camping—which I'd always loved—and that uncertainty (*where will we be tenting tonight?*) which I've always needed. So my day trips got longer in the name of practice, I spent some money on a set of bottom-of-the-line panniers, and early in the fall of 1980 I took off one morning for Montreal, 400 miles away.

The third day out was the best, as I came to realize in later trips that it always was or is, and in mid-afternoon I had my first view of Canada and the wide St. Lawrence. A couple of hours later I got to the big bridge at Ogdensburg, N.Y.—100 miles downriver from Montreal—, one of those two-lane steel deck affairs that rises and then falls precipitously. There was a toll-house at the start-up but the man waved me past calling out that I should just be careful when I got up on top. I was and cruised

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down the far side into Canada feeling good in that breeze that came off the river and feeling good too to be leaving the U.S.A. behind me for a little while. This was more than adventure, it was the *unlikely* adventure of bicycling alone to another country and more, it was the promise I'd made myself when I'd stopped smoking—this was sport, this was an athletic prowess hitherto beyond myself, this was *grace*. The man at Customs/Douanes came out, looked at me knowingly and asked, "Ever been in trouble with the law?"

3.5.

Most Canadians live within a hundred miles of the U.S., sandwiched between us (us?) and that Canadian *space* above them. "Border towns," someone said in an Orson Welles movie from the '50s, "bring out the worst in both cultures"; the line stuck with me because it seemed patently false, so *much* of a lie, & yet was delivered with the ring of truth or at least the spirit of wise inquiry. I only understood it years later when someone pointed the obvious out to me: that the film—*Touch of Evil*—was awkwardly about miscegenation.

3.7.

Eight falls later I did the trip to Montreal again. This time though I went the hard way, through the Adirondacks, and approached downtown from the south—over the car-&-bus-choked Pont Cartier—arriving there at rush hour. (At the border they'd been suspicious and wanted to know how much money I had: they'd been satisfied when I showed my VISA card.) I checked into the guest-house where Katharine and I always stayed at the east end of downtown, napped for an hour and then went out and wandered some, feeling unusually lonely, lost in spirit as I ranged that night down rue Ste. Catherine. I was trying to snap out of my funk by walking at a quick, city pace when I passed a short white man my age whose look I recognized and, since I was by then close to 40, whom I was glad to have left behind me. He caught up, though, at the

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next corner and when the light changed we walked across together, both of us looking over at an ambulance screaming by down the middle of one-way Ste. Catherine. "Everybody gets to ride in one of those sooner or later," he said. It was then, when he turned to speak, that I caught the wildness of his eye—before it had been the way he was walking, I think, that had clued me to his being a certain crazed garrulous type, a type that finds me attractive. But an apocryphal story on Abe Lincoln has him, during one of his visits across the Potomac, tipping his stovepipe to a slave who had tipped his straw hat to the President and explaining his behavior to a white companion with "I'd not want him to think he was more of a gentleman than me" so I responded to this boy that I was going to try to put off the ambulance ride for as long as possible and he agreed that that was a good idea. He didn't like the east much, he volunteered then, all these laid-back businesspeople. I liked the mix of cultures, I said, the sense of possibility and adventure that a big city brought. He owned that he was in the import/export field out of Vancouver and was used to "dealing with Chinese," in whose language "there ain't no *word* for mañana." Perhaps he thought I was Hispanic. We walked on like that to the end of the block where he turned south calling over his shoulder, "Good luck in your travels, m'sieur!"

I'd been right about whatever it was I'd recognized when first I'd passed him, what I recognize. Something on his part with a soft racial edge to it—the Chinese, the Latinos, & where am I in all that? But what was it *he* understood that allowed him to sing out such a blessing—*Good luck*—even if it was, arguably, mixed?

3.9.

We were always going to Montreal. By car, by train. We used to go Xmas shopping there back in the '80s when we had a little money—Eaton's, the Bay, the funky shops down by the river—in those years we lived in upstate N.Y. But alone I was always going to Canada, the slow fade across the border itself, over the St. Lawrence by bridge or ferry, going on across into that deep geography: forms of land & water against which the national must, I'd think, define itself. And define itself also against the

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U.S. and what passes here for municipal culture or New World Order or whatever this country is selling now. Whatever's being broadcast. George Bowering talked about "the antenna grope for Buffalo TV," that in a poem written before cable. The gaze across water at the islands of another place.

4. (1985)

The second time I went to Burlington, Vermont, I came in at dusk on the ferry across Lake Champlain from Port Kent, N.Y.—the lake forms that part of the borders of New York, Vermont, and Quebec. This was summer 1971, I was with a white man my age (a friend from school) and when the boat touched shore we commenced a walking tour of downtown, looking at the locals and letting them see us, the way of 20-year-olds everywhere. Another young man—I still recall clearly his thick blond hair and moustache, his wild eye—approached us in a park and welcomed us to the venue, turning his head to assure *me* that "people treat each other decent in this town." (An article about Vermont in one of last year's *Ebony*s referred to it as "the whitest state in the country," demographics proving it true.) Though I had understood that the blond man's speech was rooted in his idea of race, I'd not been aware of how anomalous I most likely was when we walked that evening through Burlington. Nor had I been, of course, when I'd landed there the first time, more or less on account of a sudden, drenching rainstorm that had come up out of nowhere when I was traveling alone earlier that summer. I'd actually spent precious little time in Burlington proper then: I'd been planning to camp in my own company on the Ottuaquechee River out in eastern Vermont but instead I found myself huddled for two hours in a diner downtown drinking coffee and talking about movies with some New York City people I'd met earlier on the road and then we'd all caught a little bus out into the country north of town. The rain had stopped sometime during the bus trip, and when we got off we walked for a long time in sunshine out a dirt road that wound way into the hills, eating oranges and apples that the woman named Ciska had had in her pack, until we got to someone's cabin by a railroad

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track where we spent a long night of various improvisations. Lots of pleasant impromptu.

But out of that trip I wrote rather much, mostly out of a kind of 20-year-old desolation that greets its lonely self everywhere, that finds reference in all settings. In one poem, though, I had been able to see myself clearly, myself with my friends from that trip together with them and separate at once in the way of the world, that poem titled "A Nigger and a Hippie."

Years later I sailed from Port Kent into Burlington again, this time right ahead of Hurricane Gloria. This was in 1985, the year before my daughter was born, and that city was the pivot point in a several days' cycling trip: I'd intended from Burlington either to go on over into New Hampshire or up into the townships east of Montreal, which I'd never seen. And, since I'd been on the road for almost a week, it was time to do a general repair—laundry, shower, dinner in a decent restaurant.

I set up my tent at a park on Lake Champlain at the northern edge of town. It was late afternoon then and the weather was getting weirder: the sky was bright but hazy and the wind was gusting in various directions. On the lake, people in wet suits were trying to ride their windsurf-boards among the whitecaps. I showered at the park's bathhouse and went back into town to see a man I'd met and liked a year earlier, an English professor at the University of Vermont. It was cordial but a little tense as I suppose I'd expected it would be: I'm not the good visitor I might have been able to pass for once, I don't have an easy way of being able to drop into somewhere where there's no agenda and so I'd begun to get nervous on the ferry which probably guaranteed that the visit would be awkward. I think my man is the same way, which is probably why I found myself attracted to him, even awkwardly, to begin with—but then there are the two of us being like that in the same difficult space.

The next morning it was drizzling and the park owners were walking around warning everyone of the coming hurricane. They'd put me on a bluff with another biker, a blond man with a Swede name from Madison, Wisconsin, so we could split the $6 campsite fee and as they explained to us which trees could conceivably—though not likely—fall when the wind got to the

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predicted speed, my bunkmate was getting visibly nervous. While I sat in my tent and wrote in my journal he went off to make phone calls, coming back to announce that he was going to ride this one out in a cheap motel he'd found by letting his fingers do the walking and did I want to join him? I thanked him for the offer but declined and he broke camp to head out to wherever it was. I left my tent up and headed into town with a load of laundry in one of my panniers and the 3-prong plan of laundromat, food, and a movie.

I spent that rainy afternoon watching *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and then *The Ploughman's Lunch*. The theatre was staffed by an attractive group of people in their 20s and 30s and—when I hung out in the lobby in between shows—I watched as they cavorted around through their own intrigues, their own gossipings. My friend, the professor I'd seen the night before, and his family had gone off across the lake to some land they owned in the Adirondacks. Later, after the second film ended, I had dinner at the counter in a diner downtown—grey rainy centerless light outside—wondering if it was the same place where I'd hunched over in a booth 14 years earlier and held forth about Robert Altman's movies, which were new then. The waitress was my age and harried, distracted by something I didn't know anything about. Outside an old black man with a silver conk and a neat moustache had been sitting under an awning on the pedestrian mall and had stared at me as I wheeled my bike by, declining to return my nod, but when I'd finished my dinner and come out it was a late, drizzly twilight and he was gone.

In the morning I realized I was sick of the infinity of outward and headed south—back towards home instead of further on. I pushed it hard all day, crossing into New York at Fair Haven in late afternoon, and, by the time darkness came, I was in the middle of nowhere, scruffy upstate with the moon beating down on me. The map said I was 12 miles or so away from Hudson Falls where I figured I could either camp or crash at a cheap motel so I pressed on into the night. I came down a hill, though, and suddenly all was awash with light and I realized that I was cruising through huge Great Meadows State Prison, Comstock, N.Y. Medium security, razor-wired Honor Block was on the north side of the road, the immense sprawl of the rest of the prison was on the other—it stretched up a hill under

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guard towers, immense, well-lit, and absolutely terrifying. I'd realized years before—I don't remember exactly when—that the prison was where the 2 Hispanic ladies I'd seen get off a train in 1970 were most likely heading but this was the first time I'd ever seen *it*, the first time I'd ever been on the road they'd disappeared down. I realized that night though, in among all the instinctual terror, that soon I'd come to the old girder bridge they'd crossed and pass then the weedy country intersection where I'd shared a bottle of Richard's Wild Irish Rose with a woman I'd liked very much once: a squirt of nostalgia for a former more innocent self, a little burst to get me past the slammer, past the vision of the prison house. But the road had been rebuilt: it crossed the Champlain Barge Canal *and* the railroad tracks on a high curvy arch and met the relocated and widened Route 4 in a flurry of turn lanes and streetlights. I swung south and headed on back into the dark, quick and disappointed, feeling a touch more than casually tragic.

4.5.

But the touch of the local on one—on myself—is what I'm always wanting when I travel, something specific, an order not with myself at some "still center" but *getting*—as we say—*over* and getting the physical self—*my ass*, as we say—over something in the way, both. Plus there's the solitude I need, my own restlessness—or rootlessness—, the way my sister and I were raised, the incredible self-consciousness we both have which I trace back in myself at least as far as kindergarten, the self-consciousness that cut me off—as my arm was severed & yet I am alive to tell thee—from many, many assumptions, from much. The need then to make a knowing cultural statement out of the weight of many things, like jazz is made—a made thing—out of what else but other things & in the specificity of place, or *against* that. Katharine says the important thing is "being portable." When I travel where I need to get is far enough to see the country change before coming back. (To see it bend, as if to my will?) "People remember you," my mother said once, more than once, meaning it as praise for what she understood to be my *presence* and as a warning that I should

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watch myself, both. When a black friend—a Cornell professor—had gone to one of the state prisons near Ithaca to talk about books and writing with the convicts there, the white guard who let him in looked at him knowingly and remarked, "We got a lotta guys in here look just like you."

5. (1990)

In June of 1990 we drove from Bloomington, Illinois—where I work now as an English professor at Illinois State—back east so I could make money by teaching summer school at Cornell. Since I'd be working hard most of the summer we decided to make a bit of a holiday of the trip itself and we planned a long route up through Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, over into Canada at Sault Ste. Marie and through North Bay and Kaladar, and back into the States via the Wolfe Island ferries.

Halfway through the 2nd day we stopped in Gladstone, on the Upper Peninsula, to indulge our daughter's wish for a playground: swings, a teeter-totter, monkey bars, etc., all in a pretty little city park fronting on Lake Michigan. As she was climbing up the ladder to the slide a group of seven- or eight-year-old boys was playing nearby on the swings—painted metal horses suspended from a set of pivots on a bar above them—and one of them began to declaim about how his pal, because his horse was painted black, was "riding a nigger horse." He found this amusing enough to repeat a couple of times though his friends had nothing to say in response and the two teenaged girls lounging nearby put on blank faces or perhaps they'd been wearing them all along.

I thought about what I should do. I think my daughter, who was 4 then, was concentrating too much on her own playing for the voices of kids across a playground to have made any impression on her. And I don't know if the boy—a wiry little blond—was aware of the word as anything other than something having to do with the color black that older kids or, more likely, his parents made jokes about. But neither do I know that it wasn't our presence in his playground that had inspired him to begin his nigger horse joke: I mean though he seemed to be

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ignoring us, not as a message in itself but as children in a group will typically be unaware of the people surrounding them, I don't *know* that his talking so wasn't a bold, sly way of seeing what he could say and get away with in front of a black adult; I've seen children do this sort of thing, and seem to remember having done things like it myself as I'd dangle from the monkey bars.

I watched his acrobatics, his hideous grace and was conscious of myself then *as* an adult, a person with the advantages of that status, just as white people have the advantages—whether they understand that or not—of their status in this old world. I watched him being energetic: now on the horses, now at the jungle gym: he was Tarzan-like in his flips, always catching himself, the way Johnny Weissmuller had managed to keep sleekly ahead of that squad of dusky extras, leaving us in his dust as he'd bop through the Hollywood back lots. What status does irony have in this old world? Anyway, I resolved to do nothing until he said or did something that I could construe as an affront directed at us. I let Madeline play a *long* time so as to give him the opportunity, but it never happened. I mean I'd intended, had he referred to us as niggers, even to his friends, or something like that, to squat down next to him and talk to him and send him home crying with a message for his parents about what the *next* black person who even heard him say "nigger" about a metal horse would likely do to his little blond ass.

But the warning presented to him as such a public service message would have been a white lie. In his famous and much-anthologized "Letter to My Nephew," James Baldwin said: "You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope." I love Baldwin but I'm sick of that word smeared loud or soft across the mouths of white people and I'm past the point of trying to love them or feeling obligated to love them and therefore trying to save their asses or their souls or the republic either. I was wanting instead to do something to him and to his parents—who probably loved him in their stupid way—that none of them would ever forget. The evil in me would have enjoyed that.

Back in the car leaving Gladstone, Katharine, who'd stayed in hearing distance but otherwise on the edge of things while I'd

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squired Madeline around, sighed over the place. The little park with its swimming beach, its vista, and its playground had, initially anyway, pleased her: it had seemed to indicate that the community of Gladstone was directed toward something positive, a statement about the prominence of the local geography, about the conjunction of land and water. In this way, she said, it had seemed different from our current city, Bloomington, which is largely focused on shopping. She looked off disdainfully at the houses, at the little business district, her idea of the town was gone.

I looked way down the road toward the bridge to Canada. This was the summer I'd just finished reading Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the *1984*-esque book about how the US gets taken over by the religious right. Ms. Atwood's book really isn't about black folks so we're just mentioned once or twice: people of color are referred to as "Children of Ham," that old chestnut, and sent off (off-camera) to Detroit to be re-settled there on, presumably, some sort of urban reservation. The handmaid of the title steals away (probably, or her Memorex'd tome does anyway) to Canada in one of the book's penultimate moments. It was a teachable, as we say, literary book: unambitious, full of the right gestures, and oddly smug in its holier-than-thou Canadian-ness; the last time I was in Montreal the huge graffiti on rue St. Denis reminded BANQUE DE MONTREAL $=APARTHEID/ CANADA COMPLICE. But it had an almost nauseating resonance to real life since that summer was also the summer of the flag-burning amendment, the summer of Hon. Jesse Helms's continuing attack on the National Endowment for the Arts, the summer of Justice Brennan's resignation from the court.

And we *had* been talking, I'll confess, for months before I read it—pillow talk, talk over nightcaps—about driving casually into Canada and just never coming back as the handmaid and her husband and *their* baby daughter had tried, unsuccessfully, to do before the main action of the novel commenced. Stopped at the border, the wife arrested, the husband shot, the baby carried off by her fellow Americans. And with that in mind it felt almost good, coming down off the bridge later that day from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan into Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and being waved through customs. We had all our stuff for the

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summer jammed into the back of the car and Madeline's tricycle was bungie-corded to the top. The tricycle had been making people laugh good-naturedly all the way through the trip and there were no questions for us at the frontier.

Once over, we stopped at the tourist information centre and Katharine went in to gather maps and brochures while Madeline and I explored the perimeter of the building, looking out toward the Soo Locks, toward the Algoma Central yards. She'd been to Europe and had had her first birthday there but this was the first time we'd taken her across into Canada. Sault Ste. Marie had of course also been the site of my first moments in Canada and I tried to explain that we were in a different country now, remembering my own excitement over that 31 years before. But I'd been twice as old then as she was now and the idea of "country" was puzzling to her. So I told her that the last time I'd been in Sault Ste. Marie I'd seen a steam locomotive and she was polite about that but not terribly interested.

It was midafternoon by then and we were planning to shoot over to North Bay and spend the night—I'd been there before of course but I'd never got to it from this direction, from the Michigan border, and I was looking forward to the ride through country that was new to me. I figured we could make it in a couple of hours and see the town leisurely before getting dinner and a motel. But when we rendezvoused back at the car Katharine looked at me ruefully and reminded me that I'd told her North Bay was 90 miles or so into Ontario. She'd told the tourist lady that and had been met by a politely incredulous stare followed by headshaking and the woman pulling out a map and suggesting we could make the 250 miles in about six hours, barring incident.

Family, family, family, the primacy of that in all contexts, at all edges. So the way was much longer than my father'd presented it as being and, doubtless, this had something to do with my mother's nixing this trip 3 decades earlier. She looks at maps and understands them. I don't think they'd meant to set us up before when I'd been on the phone with them about North Bay but they had, oh they *had*, and Katharine and I laughed and laughed there in the parking lot finally getting the punchline—being told the punchline by the lady at the border like she'd been waiting there—to a very old story.

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LEN ROBERTS

Second-Grade Angel

Each Choir had 6,666 Legions,
with 6,666 angels in each of these
and I knew as sure as the fluorescent
light
in that second grade class kept blinking
that I had been one of them, still was,
but sent
to Earth because of some unforgivable
sin,
that all I had to do was lift the window
and I could soar out onto Ontario Street,
wings
erupting from my shoulders, the white
shirt
tearing off, the school's striped tie
and gray trousers floating away, and I knew
I had fire
in my tongue, my right hand filled with
lightning,
that Sister Maria must have seen it
but decided
to keep quiet so the others wouldn't bow
down to me and lose their places
as we Pledged our Allegiance and recited
the Commandments, the Mysteries,
the invisible wings on my either side telling me
again
my true father was not a bread man for the Golden
Eagle bread company,
my mother not a textile stitcher who danced
nights with a drunk Irishman,

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knowing I could soar above the blue Earth, up
into the darkness
where my brother did not walk alleys calling
for rags,
that dogs howled when I walked by because
they sensed
the fire in my body, that the dates of my birth,
3/13/50
added up to the magical number of 66
and gave me power over seasons and planets, able
to make
Margaret Blake throw up because she tripped me,
giving Ronny Michaels the hiccups for shoving
me down the stairs,
sure even then I would ascend again some day,
despite my heavy body, the warts on my hands,
and I would become who I was, and I would know
my real name.

On Hearing that We Were All Boundless, Unimaginable Energy

In that third grade class when I heard
we were all boundless,
unimaginable energy packed into our small
bodies,
I looked out at the snow falling
in that upstate New York gray morning
and felt myself
beginning to freeze, I put my nose
to the wet window
and breathed out what I thought to be
my soul,

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letting it become mist in which I drew
my initials
inside a watery heart, a wavery arrow
piercing it with a triangular tip,
the last thing I saw before Sister Thomas
hit
me with her pointed ruler, told me to stand
before the class
with the white dunce cap balanced
on my head, but
I was gone down Ontario Street into
Garcia's music
as he sat, legless on the corner, playing
the violin,
I rode on the blue blanket of the Freihofer's
horse as it clopped
to the back door of town hall, I was set
free
of my poor body being poked and laughed at
by those other poor bodies,
Lorraine and Ann in their white blouses and
plaid skirts,
Alfred with his three rings gleaming
while I returned to hover above Sister's
head, became
the jaguar prowling the cork board behind her,
closing my eyes so no one could see the streaming
rays of light,
keeping my hands balled so they wouldn't flow
with heat,
tightly biting my lips so the words would not come
out by which they might know me,
gulping them down, one by one, tasting the mist.

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Counting the Black Angels

When I looked up, I saw
133,306,668,
the number of angels Satan
took with him into darkness,
leaving the number on the right,
266,613,336,
to remain loyal to the Throne,
and I knew it was a good one-
third
that had spread their wings
and settled at the core
where fire burned forever
the soul of my father,
the dark man who had spent hours
drinking at Boney's Bar,
and I knew my mother would join
him
there for leaving with the fat
Irishman,
that I would have to cut off my
hand
so it wouldn't keep reaching to
Karen Awlen's
pigtail whisking my desk, I would
have to tie
a crucifix to my penis to stop it
from rising
nights with naked women on top of
me, their breasts
dangling the way Sister Marie's beads
dangled
from her black robe when she swayed
down the aisle,
the silver cross jostling between
her knees

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until I had to turn away, look out
the window to where snowflakes
fell so thickly,
so swiftly I could not even hope
to give them the names
of the Black Angels, Apollyon,
the Angel of the Bottomless Pit,
Sammael, the
Poisonous One, Belial, Most
Worthless,
and Maestema, the Accusing Angel
who pointed right at me through
my half-formed face in the window
and whispered
Ann Harden, Ann Harden, Irene
in her blue
bathing suit, the One who saw
the nights I stared into the dark
of Olmstead Street's alley
hoping to see Lorraine's mother
take off her bra,
Maestema, who saw me offer
Sherry a nickel in the back row
of the Cohoes Theater
for one little feel, who tangled
my fingers
in Michele's thick hair that morning
at the West Side Park,
dogs barking because they knew
I was a Black Angel, too, one
of the fallen
into fires of lies and lust,
one who snuck out those hot summer
nights
to sit on the back porch where I
smoked forbidden cigarettes
and opened the June 1962 *Playboy*
centerfold,
felt the seven serpent heads
root

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in my skin, one for each night
of the week,
felt the black wings erupt
from my shoulders,
forming the scalloped shadows I could
show no one else
and so tucked under T-shirts and sport
coats,
binding them for months with the
incense
of St. Bernard's church, hearing
them rustle and snap when lovely Mary
walked to the board
to draw the chambers of the heart,
keeping silent, not saying a word
as they lifted me, weightless, resolved
into the dark.

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STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT

The Ruts of the Oregon Trail

The ancient ruts thread through fields
where ryegrass and winter wheat raise
their first green to a sun that climbs
the dome of its April arc, charging the stems
and shoots that crack and settle the red clay
around the spreading, thirsting root-mats.

They vanish in the summer's steady growth,
hidden where the stalks form seed-heads
that undulate in soft and swaying waves
that crest and break to the west on foothills
where sheep show gray as rocks against the earth.

In fall they fill with grains the thresher misses,
to feed the pheasant brood and prairie chicken
gleaning in the yellow morning light,
in salt-sharp air that dries the dew
from ruts whose lines larks trace from above.

Winter, and the spirits of the dead
line the ruts where passing wagons
shed their ballast of trunks and chairs:
oak whose tight-grained mass sunk the narrow wheels
and broke the hearts and wind of horses
thin and starving, dying as they moved,
like the weary souls whose whip-hands lost their force,
their heat, in the blinding, freezing wind,
the white and deadly January sky.

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Welcome Back

It's the annual harvest festival:
the Chair welcomes the faculty back
to work (since, of course,
that stuff this summer wasn't work)
and to the latest round of budget cuts.

But who needs phones,
or travel money, or classes numbering fewer
than Napoleon's regiments at Arcola?
Besides, the Chair makes jokes
to make us feel happy, and soothed,

so we don't think twice about the water
bubbling up past the portholes while the band
plays "Nearer, My God, to Thee,"
or the leaking ceilings,
peeling paint, backed-up toilets,

everywhere on campus, save the
Athletic Department, to whom the citizens turn
in this, the hour of need,
for solace, for values and priorities,
and the elusive National Championship.

No one cheers for the poor old library
whose top floors never got past the blueprints
and another budget cut, where the books
fall to dust in stacks prowled by muggers
or stored in attics for want of cataloguers.

At least the Chair makes us laugh,
a bouquet of one-liners held to our noses,
and smiling takes our grateful applause
like a standup comic while the audience
waters their weak drinks with their tears.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

It Takes Time

Since winter
I have been watching
the round of the flowering tree
from naked, on to a vague
smoke in shadowy copper.

Then it takes time, to hint
copper with purple; buds
swing sunward to unfold
in scraps of paleness—first dawn
suddenly alight on a tree
sky-pink, hardly there.

One . . . another . . . shining together
in a haze of petals, a hillside,
a jungle, blazing fertility brightness
a whole week . . . until a frail
rosy drizzle begins, steadies
into a set-in rain
to flood the grass, down from these new
foliage mountains shedding blushes
for the work of summer.

In time they too
colour to autumn blood-impasto
that will carpet the grass again, leaving
bleak winter-black of scaffold.

It takes time, yes.
Nothing else could do it. Even
Time takes a year.

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The Dying God

People in that valley
say the wood is a shrine.
The small oakwood
on the hillside. Say a god
has lived there since earth began;
and at dusk or dawn or
before an eclipse or tempest
He may be seen. But his name?

I do not know.

A heathen (they gently remind me)
I have not seen the god;
but yes, walking among the oaks,
always I have felt . . . perhaps nothing;
or some empty presence . . . nameless
numinous. Open dark spaces
between those trees infinitely
alive and, yes, benign.
Is Nameless against evil then?

I do not know.

But yesterday, I was walking
the familiar green walk
among those trees, birds singing
breezily, breeze
singing also, rustling leaves; and
beyond that, nothing. Plain
everyday daylight, like here
or there, or everywhere, or all
three. A pleasant little wood.
Otherwise nothing; and now still

I do not know.

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NEAL BOWERS

Death Sentence

We knew we'd find him guilty
and would have saved the state
the time of proving the obvious
if we could have waved our hands
the way a dozen people sipping coffee
might stop a story they've heard more often
than complaints about the weather,
a slow erasure on the air,
because there was the look of him,
an aimlessness, as if he meant to go
nowhere and everywhere all at once,
a kind of random certainty,
as when a tornado wobbles into town
and obliterates a house without lifting
a shingle on the roof next door
and people say, "the will of God,"
having no other explanation
for their luck or their lives,
wanting to be blessed or damned
since either means being chosen,
and anything is better than finding
your walls blown down or a stranger
waiting in an unlit corner without reason,
which is why not knowing why he did it
only made us more determined
to convict him, his innocent plea
merely another layer on our resolve,
though he must have sensed
how grateful we would be,
not so much for an admission of guilt
as for an explanation, a light
turned on at last

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in that chamber of the heart
where violence polishes the cutlery
like a compulsive butler,
a frightening formality
suggesting something like purpose,
a rational brutality we understood
as we studied his face
and imagined it hooded in the chair
plugged in to kingdom-come,
which for him would be hell, of course,
and I confess I thought
about what it would feel like
to throw the switch myself,
a soft flexing of the wrist
as when pulling down a window shade,
a smooth glide waving him
into that sizzling darkness
he deserved for being what he was,
not one of us but something foul,
a thing that shouldn't be allowed
to waste the air, no matter how well
his lawyer dressed him, cut his hair,
drilled him on etiquette,
as if a rotted soul could be concealed
with a necktie and cologne,
all of us gagging on the stench,
thinking, "Welcome to our slaughterhouse,
you son-of-a-bitch," the judge's hammer
falling hard on his head
when we finally gave the signal,
putting an end to the formalities
and the time-wasting niceties of justice,
his walking carcass led away
for the last time, for the last time
his evil face grinning back at us
as if he knew something we didn't know.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

Canonizing

THE DEBATE OVER MULTICULTURAL VALUES in American education and the arts has become today one of the most useful and stimulating intellectual controversies this society has had to face and, at one and the same time, a spectacle that gets more ludicrous every year. Part of this has to do with the American love of hyperbole, of an exaggeration that quickly reaches comic proportions. Issues that should, and could, be discussed on some plausible middle ground are ignored until they are fought over in an arena and a style that is trendy, theatrical, and reductive, ready grist for the media mill. And the performers too know that, if they want to be heard in an attention-deficit culture, they've got to stake out a claim for an extreme, easily identifiable territory. Camille Paglia on "Sixty Minutes" is, you know, like a hard act to follow. So between dead-white-males-be-damned and the-barbarians-are-at-the-gates, what other voices or perspectives are heard?

Several recent painting exhibitions touch on this issue, provoking some welcome thought about how we want to place (or, historically, how we have dealt with) artists like William H. Johnson, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Ed Clark, Palmer Hayden, Bob Thompson, Lois Mailou Jones, Alma Thomas, and Hale Woodruff.

The William H. Johnson show recently seen at the Whitney Museum is a good starting point because the paintings of this sad, gifted man cover a wide range of theme and skill. And he is a true unknown, even today—or was until this much-discussed exhibition made its rounds and occasioned the publication of the first substantial book on his life and art.[1] Johnson's own story is quite interesting and makes clear how painfully plausible his obscurity is, how miraculous that we have this body of work with us after all. His roots were poor and Southern. He escaped Florence, South Carolina, to New York City at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, studied under Charles W. Hawthorne at the National Academy of Design and was befriended by the Ash Can realist George Luks. At the time of his expatriation to Europe, where he lived in France and then Denmark (marrying a white woman, a Dane), Johnson was a well-trained realist. An early

[1] Richard J. Powell, HOMECOMING: The Life and Art of William H. Johnson. Smithsonian Institution. $29.95.

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self-portrait of 1923–26 is a fine example of academic portraiture. When he returned to America in the late 1930s, though, it was as a dynamic landscape and portrait painter in the spirit of Chaim Soutine and Edvard Munch who decided, for a time, to devote his considerable talents to an examination of African-American life. The confidence with which Johnson had learned to manipulate paint while abroad, as much as the spectacular color sense he had arrived at post-Hawthorne and post-Luks, made him the ideal person to delve into the areas he then wanted to treat. At a time when American artists were preoccupied with geometric abstraction and straight social realism, he would follow his own bent, reflecting on the problems and affirmations of his race in a distinctive, personal, un-documentary voice. Not surprisingly, these paintings and gouaches did not attract much notice in their time. Professional neglect, the death of his wife from cancer in 1944, and Johnson's own gradual mental decay made what should have been a rise to great renown a pitiful falling-off. Johnson died, impoverished and mentally impaired, at a Long Island asylum in 1970 after two decades of incarceration there.

The art that represents William H. Johnson's "homecoming" after a profitable time of study in more cosmopolitan circles was divided in this show into discrete categories. There was the landscape of Zora Neale Hurston—rural Southern blacks at work with their mules, at home with their families—and the world of Ann Petry and Langston Hughes—Harlem couples at play, noble portraits, black men and women under assault at the time of the riots of 1943. One gallery was given over to drawings in gouache and pen-and-ink of the busy, segregated military life of the World War II period and one (the least artistically successful) to tableaux of personages Johnson called "freedom fighters," a group that included the Allied leadership, the Founding Fathers, Nat Turner, John Brown, Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. Different as his subject matter was, with some pictures more complexly narrative or some more plain and suggestive than others, Johnson did adhere in this period to certain formal patterns. Painting on plywood or burlap, he developed a flat, pictographic style for his figures and objects. He used bright, solid colors, doing away with shadows and gradations of color. In this self-consciously naive vein—that would never be mistaken for the work of a truly untutored soul—he gave a sense of substance, a *hereness*, a presence that implies weight and endurance, to his people, whether farmers, soldiers, or city types. If it was rare for any American artist of the late 1930s and early 1940s to have the self-assurance to tackle the issue of "primitiveness," how much more unusual for an African-American who could paint like an Impressionist or a Fauve to move in that direction. (Interestingly, some of Johnson's sharpest critics of these paintings were black writers.) In sum, this risk, or need, resulted in a probing, serious, intelligent, and occasionally moving body of work in which content rarely eclipses

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style and a love of color and texture works together with an affection for the people he is studying. *Going to Church* (1940) has a playful dignity to it, *Moon over Harlem* (1943) is the right blend of nightmare and reality, and *Mom and Dad* (1944) invites contemplation without sentimentality. These images—of a rural family of four in their mule-drawn carriage, the Harlem riots, and the artist's parents—implictly attack the cry of Modernism in the thirties that subject matter was finally dead ("we have killed [it]," as Leger triumphantly remarked) and point to a whole area of racial and cultural experience that had yet to be explored, that couldn't possibly be seen as tired or "dead." The all-important difference, though, between Johnson's discovery of his "American Scene" and, say, Thomas Hart Benton's was that Johnson's was being effected by a true Modernist, a man steeped in the culture of Soutine and the French school. His work, in this light, was an advance, not a retreat.

Finally, we have in full context for the first time in my adult lifetime the great oil-on-canvas *Man in Vest* (circa 1939), a painting of an aging black man in a white shirt and dark tie and vest resting his hands on the back of a red chair against a thickly brushed greenish background. This is a portrait, as simple and assertive and memorable as any portrait to be seen in an American museum, that for years has been on view, intermittently, at the Smithsonian. Who is the man? A porter, a preacher, a retired farmer? Who knows? He is a man, very black and rather old, and that is all Johnson cares to tell us, but in the way he has drawn the massive body and the force with which he has applied the paint, he tells us more: something about what his sitter has known and seen and the dignity we should accord him for that. In the setting of a reconsideration of the painter's career, we might now respond to William H. Johnson in the same way. Somehow we tragically missed him in his day, relegated him to the status of enigma or curiosity, but it is high time that a full measure of interest and dignity were directed toward so sensitive an eye, heart and hand.

This exhibition, which originated at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., before coming to New York, will be seen at the Addison Gallery in Andover, Massachusetts in the spring of 1993, will then move on to the Greenville Museum of Art in South Carolina, and will conclude its travels at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas next winter.

Just as the Johnson show was closing at the Whitney, the Jean-Michel Basquiat retrospective was opening. The New York art scene being what it is, this exhibition had the cognoscenti out in greater numbers. To those "in the know," this is one painter eminently ready to take his place in the hierarchy of major American artists. How curious, then, that this survey of a decade's work turned out to be such an enervating experience.

A Basquiat painting is supposed to be a boundlessly energetic thing,

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pulsating with the rhythms of the street, angry, savvy, cryptically narrative—part graffiti art, part color-field, part Expressionism in the *l'art brut* tradition of Dubuffet and Wols, all as politically meaningful or suggestive as the latest Spike Lee movie. In *Horn Players* (1983), for instance, we have the fragmented, cartoonish forms of Dizzie Gillespie and Charlie Parker painted against a black background covered with the words "ALCHEMY" and "ORNITHOLOGY," assorted scrawls, some representational and some not, and patches of vigorously messy paint. *Hollywood Africans* (also 1983) is overloaded with its own share of markings, faces, and doodles against an appealing ground of yellow, blue, and black, though only two of its references (the feet evoking the Grauman's sidewalk and the word "bwana") seem to have much to do with the subject of black actors and movie-world racism. But, then, that is true of most of these pictures: they touch on subjects and feelings in a vein that purports to be explicit but is really inchoate or glib. They don't have the force or validity of a city wall spontaneously, cleverly, diabolically attacked with slogans and images. Moreover, I would think that even a Basquiat lover would be a little dismayed by the hodgepodge on view at the Whitney this winter in that the decent, the bad, and the mediocre examples of his work were scattered throughout the fourth-floor galleries, with a few obviously failed efforts hung in rather prominent locations. (The fact that we find by the entrance of the first gallery a crude simple-minded painting like the untitled one owned by the Anina Nosei Gallery—the canvas of which is literally buckling from all the time it has spent in Ms. Nosei's SoHo basement waiting for a credulous buyer—is downright weird.) The paintings, on the whole, are easily digested, in sharp (almost comic) contrast to the austere Agnes Martin retrospective on the floor below, but in truth a faint aura of pastiche and pretend-liveliness, even stagnation, pervades the whole business.

The appeal of Jean-Michel Basquiat is not hard to understand; he is a phenomenon unique to New York in the 1980s—a time when roughhewn imagery and painterly drips were back in fashion, when liberal guilt was at its height, when the Warhol aura was diminishing. When the craving for a *peintre maudit* was intense. A child of a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother born in Brooklyn (albeit of a middle-class background; a true ghetto genius would have been too much to hope for), a kid who enjoyed the imprimatur of Warhol himself, and an early loss to drug addiction and a fast life, he fit the bill perfectly. Embodying elements of one's time is hardly a drawback to memorable achievement—no seedy "la belle epoque" means no seedy/wonderful Maupassant or Zola. What we want to ask, though, is whether the artist in question is a figure of enduring talent who pushes at the limits of our perception of the world and of his art form or is just a symbol or byproduct of the moment. For this viewer,

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Basquiat is the paradigm of the latter. As such, he deserves a minor place in a survey of our era, not the halo of a Rimbaud or a Van Gogh.

Inaugurating new galleries devoted exclusively to African-American art at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford last fall was a traveling show entitled "Free Within Ourselves" culled from the collection of the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. (Hartford was the first stop of the show which will travel in 1993 and 1994 to New York, Sacramento, Memphis, and Columbus, Georgia.) The Fleet Galleries of African-American Art (so named because of the funding provided by the Fleet Bank) is, to my knowledge, the first venture into separatist hanging space at a major mainstream institution, and—while the Wadsworth is to be applauded for its interest in broadening its base (last June this same museum opened the Amistad Foundation Gallery, which deals with art and visual artifacts of black life)—the question of how desirable a separate area is for black painters does linger and nag at one. How much better it would be for the Wadsworth to buy an Ed Clark and a Frederick Brown to hang in its modern rooms with its Alex Katz and its Claes Oldenburg.

In any event, the traveling exhibition is a fine one and its premise couldn't be any more urgent. The forty-eight paintings and eight sculptures from Washington are assembled to prove that the canon is indeed in need of adjustment, that there are names and artworks out there that demand wider attention and appreciation. Of course, this is mixing politics and art—as they have always been mixed in life, in the lives of artists, in this society. Of course, this will involve differences of opinion—I don't believe the painters Henry Ossawa Tanner or Edward Mitchell Bannister or the sculptor Edmonia Lewis are any better than other academic artists of their day and I don't care to linger over their works simply because these men and women are black and were badly treated in the nineteenth century. That isn't the issue. Forget the red herrings. The issue centers on the volatility of Hale Woodruff's *Georgia Landscape* (1934), on the funky energy of Bob Thompson's *Descent from the Cross* (1963), on the proficient color-abstractions from the 1970s by Alma Thomas (who died in 1978 at the age of 87), on Frederick Brown's explosive portraits, on Palmer Hayden's superb vignette *The Janitor Who Paints* (1937), on the impasto in William H. Johnson's *Self Portrait with Pipe* (1937), on Lois Mailou Jones's African theme works, on the limestone carvings of William Edmondson and Elizabeth Catlett's sleek, sculpted heads. Seen even in galleries that are less spacious than one would want for such a show, these are artworks that engage us in the moment of the looking and arouse a desire to see more examples of that artist. A desire, alas, apt to be frustrated under the old order.

The Guggenheim Museum has taken its licks over the years, and

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much of the abuse has been deserved, as a building inhospitable to art and art-lovers alike. It is the problem of the pinball-machine sensation: we roll down the slope as directed, taking in what we can of the oddly angled view along the way. Yet a few recent exhibitions have made clear that the setting is not uniform in the havoc it makes of aesthetic experience, that the great white spiral does work reasonably well when *its color and openness* are put to the right use. Minimalist Dan Flavin's neon light sculptures looked better last year on site in a space that is sculptural itself and offered a very limited chromatic competition—in other words, the Flavins glowed as they are intended to and the ramps and tilting walls of the building did not subdue them, as they do so many paintings. No conflict: a rare moment in Mr. Wright's domain. In the same way, the Guggenheim's spring show, bombastically entitled "Picasso and the Age of Iron," was refreshing both for the high quality of the artworks presented and the unexpectedly graceful mesh of object and forum.

The show dealt with a simple premise, so simple that it seems incredible that this idea hasn't been tackled before. Cubism as a groundbreaking collaborative effort (from a Picasso-Braque starting point) and as a potent influence has been repeatedly explored in museum shows in the 1970s and 1980s; the concept of open, fluid metal sculpture—"dessiner dans l'espace" (drawing in space), as Julio Gonzalez dubbed it—and the great varieties of expression it has led to has been a subject of less concentrated attention. Proof of that fact is that most people would credit the development of this style of sculpture to Picasso, when in truth it was Picasso and his Catalan colleague Julio Gonzalez who in the late 1920s opened this new avenue, a path that was to be every bit as fertile as Cubist painting. And even more people, when asked what iron sculpture meant in our time, would point to the gigantic Calder mobiles that occupy so many plazas in urban America—a hopeless cliché by now. Gonzalez, the brilliant metalworker who taught Picasso to weld, is still little-known in the United States, and rectifying that wrong is not the least of the show's merits. The man David Smith called "the father of all iron sculpture" deserves perhaps a retrospective of his own in the nineties.

What we saw at the Guggenheim, in a spacious array, were more than one hundred iron works by Picasso, Gonzalez, and three other modern masters who made their own spectacular use of the movement away from polished bronze, smooth marble, and wood: David Smith, Alberto Giacometti, and the Alexander Calder of the smaller, more frolicsome "planetary" constructions. (Some two dozen drawings and paintings by Picasso are also included but their effect is to give a slightly lopsided feel to the show, as there aren't any paintings or drawings on view by Smith, Giacometti, etc. So, once again, Picasso dominates when he should simply lead.) What we are meant to ponder is the exuberant formalist question of the discovery of new materials and what that can mean to an art form's growth, in this case

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the breaking-down of the barrier between an industrial, allegedly inartistic material like iron and an allegedly "refined" art like sculpture. For each of the three sculptors who followed the Picasso-Gonzalez union took their freedom from the old materials and old themes in an entirely different direction.

Picasso and Gonzalez gave inventive, solid form to their abstract drawings of objects and people; they used metal colanders for heads, strips of bent metal for hair, a weave of bars and scraps for appendages and sight lines. David Smith, on the other hand, pressed ahead with his own sculptural vocabulary, creating heavier seeming works that often paradoxically play on a sense of rapid motion and airy landscape. The *Hudson River Landscape* (1951) owned by the Whitney Museum is a wandering-line tour of hills, stairs, windows, clouds, surges and undulations. Calder's pistils, balls with counterweights, steel fish, tightropes, cylinders, abstract spiders, and mini-solar systems are the warmly whimsical side of Surrealism, a world of cosmic tottering without the angst. Giacometti's forms, of course, are more tense and psychological: e.g., images of imprisonment like *Nose* (1947), in which a head dangles from a rope within a cage with only its huge proboscis extending out into free space, or expressions of anomie like the dazed, elongated *Walking Man* (1960). In this thorough and varied exhibition, metal sculpture (as drawing given three-dimensional form, as a drive to make sculpture less static and ponderous) seems an appropriate mode for the most playful and the most existentially worried states of mind—no mean accomplishment of the many that High Modernism lays claim to. Combine that thought with the resplendent color experience of "Picasso and the Age of Iron"—the uncompromising blacks, browns, grays, and rust of the metal against the endless unfurling white of the Guggenheim's walls—and you have a very special, fruitful collaboration on all levels.

The spring exhibition of Daumier drawings at the Metropolitan Museum was a similarly elating encounter with an artist who has yet to be embalmed by his "classic" status; but, at one and the same time, it evoked some mixed, even depressing reactions. For while Smith, Calder, and Giacometti are long gone, sculpture isn't. The battle is nip-and-tuck these days—talk to those young sculptors in search of gallery representation in a world gone mad for "mixed media" and installation art—but the form lives. Drawing, on the other hand, is not a feature of the contemporary scene, not a curricular staple at the hottest art schools, not an element of modern creativity likely to hold a trendy curator's or collector's attention for long. To look at a survey of Daumier's best graphic work is to immerse oneself in a nineteenth-century career that was a pinnacle of an art form but also something of a coda. It is to be reminded of what the twentieth century doesn't have.

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The qualities that made Honoré Daumier the great *Charivari* satirist and student of human foibles were all on display in this show of chalk, pen and ink, and watercolor drawings, many of which were a mixture of the three graphic tools. This is the output of a man who was passionately interested in people and in the pleasures, shortcomings, and defining idiosyncrasies of his time; who had little interest in the academic principles of draftsmanship that the art-school education he never had would have inculcated; and who drew from a deep inner need to chronicle and interpret, with a sure sense of how important it was to give free rein to his own temperament, however odd or subjective it might seem in contrast to the Ingres model of perfection. He was also a man in whom humor and indignation were uniquely blended. Daumier's ponderous judges and pontificating lawyers are no less ridiculous than the monsters of *Bleak House*—but, like Dickens, Daumier alternates the mood of his portraits and scenes from gloom (these are the people who determine men's fates!) to drollery (what wrinkly, anemic souls, what clowns!). The urban streets, for him, are sites of poverty and unhappiness as well as spectacle and a healthy chaos. His poor and bourgeois characters sitting down to eat, tending to their children, or waiting for their homeward bound trains are quiveringly drawn with the roughest and freshest line and with real affection, but they have also been left their own kinks, secrets, and flashes of personality, some of them funny and some of them menacing. Even the atmosphere of the haunting *The Connoisseur*, a taut pen-and-ink and charcoal drawing of a solitary collector pondering his pictures and statuettes, is charged with a certain kind of gentle irreverence. The head of this comfortably situated art-lover is weirdly skeletal, reminding us—reminding him—that if the treasures on the wall and the table are immortal, soon enough the gazer himself will have passed from the scene forever. Like many of the greatest artists, Daumier manages to insinuate in his drawings more than a purely aesthetic gratification, namely a feeling for how quickly it all goes, how precious the time is, how observant we need to be.

The catalogue for the Metropolitan's exhibition includes interesting essays on a range of topics: Daumier's sculpture and the sculptural qualities of his drawings, the sense of movement in his graphics, the recurring image of the artist and connoisseur in his work. He is one of the very few nineteenth-century artists not discussed to death as a bridge to something else—Post-Impressionism, Modernism, whatever; he demands, and gets, the *individual* attention he wants us to afford him and all aspects of modern life.

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RICHARD HORNBY

English Versus American Acting

EUGENE O'NEILL IS THE GREATEST AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT—*hélas*! His flaws would be obvious even to a high school student: the clunky dialogue with its textbook slang, the dabbling in every faddish dramatic form imaginable, the pretentious striving for Significance. Yet, from time to time, O'Neill's characters break free of his shackles. Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones*, Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh*, James Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, muscled their way onto the stage, and into our national imagination.

Anna Christie is a similar example. There she is, a prostitute with a heart of gold, with a downtrodden sailor father who goes around incessantly mooing about "dat old davil sea." She is redeemed by the love of a simple Irish stoker whom she helps rescue after a shipwreck. Her father at first opposes the match, but becomes reconciled, shipping out on the same vessel with his new son-in-law. The plot is enough to give you diabetes. O'Neill was supposedly influenced by Strindberg, Dreiser, and Conrad, but his plays at times seem like early Harlequin Romances. Yet, in the midst of the syrup, the characterization of Anna has a startling realism. O'Neill knew whores, both as a customer and as an observer, and he presents a picture of Anna's life that is neither sentimental nor moralistic. Raised in brutal poverty on a Midwestern farm (O'Neill, a city dweller for much of his life, never subscribed to the agrarian myth of rural goodness so popular with other American writers), treated alternately as a slave and as sexual chattel, she drifted into prostitution, which actually improved her meager life. "Taking care of other people's kids, always listening to their bawling and crying, caged in, when you're only a kid yourself and want to go out and see things," she cries. "At last I got the chance—to get into that house. And you bet your life I took it. And I ain't sorry neither." Nevertheless, she landed in jail, became deathly ill there, was sent to the hospital, and has since barely recovered. Hard as nails, a despiser of men, she nonetheless retains normal impulses toward love and idealism. Her chance encounter with Mat Burke, the young Irish stoker, awakens these feelings, though she is fully aware that he is no paragon, and that their union may lead to nothing but grief.

The Roundabout Theatre Company presented a superb production of *Anna Christie* in January in their new Criterion Theatre, a block from O'Neill's birthplace in Times Square. The English actress

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Natasha Richardson (daughter of Vanessa Redgrave and director Tony Richardson) performed triumphantly as Anna. From the moment of her first entrance, into "Johnny-the-Priest's" waterfront saloon, looking thin, feverish, heavily roughed, desperate, hard-bitten, world-weary at age twenty, she embodied the character totally. Later, on her father's barge, stripped of makeup and wearing old oilskins, she seemed eternally young and fresh, reborn by her encounter with nature. Anna's mercurial emotions, as she fluctuates between idealism and cynicism, seem heavy-handed in the text, but Richardson made the shifts seem natural and poignant.

The Irish actor Liam Neeson (recently seen in Woody Allen's film *Husbands and Wives*) equaled Richardson in his performance as Mat. Neeson is a large, muscular man who was fully credible as a stoker, yet who also displayed sensitivity and love in his relation to Anna. Mat is supposed to be barely literate, superstitiously Catholic, and a hard-drinking womanizer, but like Anna he has an underlying idealism. In his case, this takes the form of what Freud called "the most prevalent form of degradation in sexual life," the tendency at the time for men to categorize women as either saints or sluts. It was, and is, difficult for such men to reconcile their sexual feelings with more tender affection; much of the conflict in the play occurs within Mat, as he tries to sort out his emotions with respect to Anna. Like Anna, Mat can shift moods suddenly, alternately trying to kiss Anna and to clobber her, threatening to kill her and asking her to shoot him, making her take an oath on a gold cross that she will never take up prostitution again, beaming with joy when she does so, and then hilariously realizing with horror that she is not a Catholic. One of the signs of a fine actor is the ability to make big emotional transitions quickly and smoothly; Neeson's performance might have been a case study for young actors.

Rip Torn, usually a flamboyant actor, gave Chris, Anna's father, a kind of brooding, stolid presence; even the constant intoning about the "davil" seemed to work. Bearded, stocky, with dark, penetrating eyes, he walked and looked "like a born sailor," as the script has it. The only disappointing part of his performance was his Swedish accent, which lacked the tonal inflections that are its distinguishing trait. Richardson, the Englishwoman, had a perfect American accent, but Torn, as is typical for an American actor, could not escape his native way of speaking.

John Lee Beatty's sets for *Anna Christie* were disappointing. Beatty is usually sure fire (see below—he had a busy season!), but here he provided settings that had little sense of locale or period. In Act II the deck of Chris's barge, awkwardly set foursquare to the audience, looked more like a dock than a vessel; in Acts III and IV, the interior of the same barge could have been a cabin in the Maine woods. It also was exceptionally narrow, even for a barge, which led to ungainly staging. The clumsy settings were partly redeemed by Marc B. Weiss's superb atmospheric lighting, however, and by Martin Pakledinaz's

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magnificent period costuming. Neeson's naked torso above his soggy overalls, Rip Torn enveloped in his oilskins, and Richardson in her hobble-skirted dress, looked like historic icons from 1920.

Following the outstanding production of *Anna Christie*, with its English actress in the title role, the Roundabout presented Shaw's *Candida*, starring an American. Mary Steenburgen is a film actress with whom I have long been madly in love. (Luckily for both of us, we have never met.) On screen, she has beauty, charm, intelligence, wit, and sexiness, plus a smile that could thaw an iceberg. With these qualities, she ought to be able to knock off the role of Candida with ease, but Steenburgen's lack of stage experience (her bio in the program listed no theatrical roles at all) was painfully obvious; I have seen better Candidas played by undergraduates. Her main deficiency is her voice, which is adequate enough for film work (i.e., she can speak smoothly and distinctly), but which is far too tight and weak for a theatrical performance, particularly in Shaw, the most verbal of all modern playwrights. A stage actor's voice is usually discussed in terms of "projection," the ability to propel words easily to the farthest seats in the theatre, but good voice work involves much more than that. (Besides, modern theatres like the Roundabout's Criterion are often small, while the larger, older ones now often use microphones.) The voice is the actor's primary instrument; using all its elements of pitch, volume, inflection, and timbre, the actor creates characters and their emotions. To a certain extent, the film actor does this also, but film is a more visual than verbal medium; where the stage actor achieves an emotional effect with, say, a trembling voice, the film actor will typically use a darting expression with the eyes. Steenburgen seemed to be performing for a camera in closeup; her performance was small and isolated, involving only her face, and her English accent, despite a dialect coach listed in the program, was dreadful.

Most of the rest of the cast had equally bad voices and accents. As the young poet Marchbanks, Robert Sean Leonard (best known as the boy in *The Dead Poets Society*) had good body language, including some wild tumbles, but spoke in a tight, adenoidal manner. Ann Dowd sounded screechy as Prossy; William Duff-Griffin was loud and equally harsh-sounding as Burgess, Candida's father. Only Robert Foxworth as the Reverend Morell had a flexible voice and an impeccable accent.

The contrast between *Anna Christie*, a modern classic American play with foreigners in two of the three leads, and *Candida*, a modern classic British play (by an Irish playwright, Shaw would have insisted, but his characters here are all English) with an all-American cast, was glaringly ironic. The English can do our plays; we cannot do theirs. What does this say about our actor training?

Wendy Wasserstein's new play, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, like her earlier *Heidi Chronicles*, is a pseudo-feminist piece that will no doubt

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eventually be performed in every college theatre in the country. The three eponymous sisters at first give the impression of being independent women, but soon reveal a predilection for inadequate men, who nonetheless manage to dominate their lives.

The oldest sister, Sara, heads an international bank. The second, amusingly named "Gorgeous," is the wife of a corporate lawyer from Newton, Massachusetts, and a radio personality herself. The youngest is Pfeni, a globe-trotting journalist. As the play begins, all three gather in London for Sara's fifty-fourth birthday. Sara, who has been married three times, in the course of the play has a one-night affair with a furrier who talks like a second-rate Jewish comic. Gorgeous reveals that her corporate lawyer husband is actually unemployed and playing at being a *film noir* detective, supported by her income as a radio purveyor of advice. Pfeni breaks up with the man in her life, a homosexual stage director. Sara's daughter, Tess, breaks up with *her* young man, an Irishman dedicated to the unlikely cause of Latvian independence.

Thus the four women, for all their supposed liberation, are defined by their relationship with men. Sara is supposed to be a big-time banker, but we see her spending no time at all on what in real life would be an all-consuming profession; in the course of the play she cooks a meal, sleeps with a man, and chats with her sisters and daughter, all traditional female activities. Gorgeous' radio work, though lucrative, is revealed to be utterly bogus; her principal obsession is elegant clothing. Pfeni, like the title character in *The Heidi Chronicles*, is hooked on a male homosexual, who leaves her because he misses men. If this is supposed to be a *feminist* play, I would hate to see one in which Wasserstein was being traditionalist!

The Broadway production of *The Sisters Rosensweig* succeeded because of superlative performances by two of the three leads. (If nothing else, Wasserstein can attract fine actresses.) Jane Alexander, who in real life is WASP to the core, played the role of Sara with a perfect balance of Jewishness and elegance, strongly mixed with intelligence and humor. Nevertheless, Madeline Kahn, the funniest American actress since Fannie Brice, managed to surpass her. Her Jewish inflections, perfect comic timing, and boundless energy made her performance a joy. At one point, the furrier brings Gorgeous the genuine Chanel suit she has always dreamed of wearing; Kahn's reaction with surprise, delight, and near-sexual ecstasy was worth the price of admission.

As Pfeni, Christine Estabrook was the weakest of the three sisters, but part of the problem was in the writing; for a hot-shot international journalist, Pfeni seems surprisingly staid and passive. John Vickery brought energy and charm to the role of the gay director; the rest of the cast were unremarkable. Daniel Sullivan directed with pace and subtlety; Jane Greenwood's costumes were, as usual, superb, as was John Lee Beatty's elegant setting, a Queen Anne style living room,

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bright and diverse, with beautiful white flowered wallpaper. One of Beatty's great strengths as a designer is his ability to suggest a world beyond what we see. Here, his gracefully angled setting, with its many levels and areas, not only made for lovely, constantly changing stage pictures, but led us imaginatively to the remainder of the sumptuous townhouse, and the genteel quarter of London in which it is situated. Finally, Pat Collins' lighting, unlike Peter Kaczorowski's overly warm, bright lighting for *Candida*, perfectly suggested the cool, misty, shifting light of soggy London.

The Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago brought their production of *The Song of Jacob Zulu*, by South African-born documentary filmmaker Tug Yourgrau, to Broadway in late March. An awkward courtroom drama, based on an actual trial in South Africa, it concerns a young black militant who bombed a shopping mall in 1985, killing four people (including two children) and wounding many more. Yourgrau's play tells the story badly, dodging the ambiguities of the situation, reducing it to a simple conflict between the good guys and the bad. A redeeming element was the lovely singing of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo a cappella choir, who acted as a chorus for the clumsy action.

Yourgrau's hero, Jacob Zulu, is the son of a Christian minister. Disgusted by the racism that oppresses him and his people, he rejects his Christian upbringing to join the militant African National Congress. After receiving secret, paramilitary training, he is ordered to plant a bomb in a location of his choosing, as a retaliation for an aerial bombing perpetrated by the government on an ANC encampment. Although the ANC, a signer of the Geneva Convention, specifically tries to avoid harming civilians, Jacob chooses a shopping mall. After the explosion, he is captured, and confesses. Nevertheless, on the urging of his mother, he pleads innocent at his trial, claiming that he intended to telephone and have the mall cleared, but was fortuitously prevented from doing so. Then, in a dream sequence, he reveals to a band of historic Zulu warriors that he never really intended any warning, that he was driven by a blind rage to kill as many whites as possible. In any case, the judge refuses to believe his explanation, and sentences Jacob to death.

The liberal New York critics found it difficult to fault the play, but, like *The Sisters Rosensweig*, it is confused and ultimately specious. Jacob is a moral chameleon, taking on the attitudes of whomever he is around—a Christian with his father, a militant with the ANC, a penitent when his mother urges him to plead innocent, an anti-white fanatic with the warriors in his dream. The potential conflicts in the play, between Christianity and militarism, or between the relative restraint of the ANC and Jacob's mindless revenge, are never explored. We are expected to sympathize with Jacob simply because he

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is black, not because his actions are in any sense admirable or even defensible.

It is interesting to contrast *The Song of Jacob Zulu* with the plays of another South African, Athol Fugard. Yourgrau writes about a militant, a stick figure surrounded by other stick figures, whom we are expected to love or hate regardless of their behavior. Fugard, recognizing that literature works best when it is indirect, deals with characters who are down-and-out, peripheral to politics, and eccentrically human. Yet, ultimately, his plays are more genuinely political, exposing the horrors of apartheid all the more powerfully because they are distanced.

The American actor K. Todd Freeman performed well as Jacob Zulu, with an impeccable South African accent, and wonderfully expressive eyes. The superb Zakes Mokae, veteran of many Fugard plays, was underused in the lifeless role of Jacob's father, but was given a *tour de force* additional part as a raging ex-convict recounting the horrors of a South African prison camp. Kevin Rigdon designed a shallow, awkward, symmetrical setting, so that Eric Simonson's directing seemed exceptionally ham-fisted. But Joseph Shabalala, leading the singers, was superb; it was a rare example of a chorus overshadowing a play, with the chorus leader having the best role in it.

Lanford Wilson's new play, *Redwood Curtain*, after being performed around the country for over a year, finally reached Broadway in late March. In concerns a Vietnamese-American teen-ager named Geri, a pianist prodigy raised in a wealthy American family, in search of her biological father. In the first scene, she pursues a strange, homeless Vietnam War veteran in the redwood forests of Northern California, gets lost, and, with the help of the ex-soldier, finds her way home again. The remaining two scenes present the same action on a symbolic level; she feels lost, alienated from her adoptive land, from her adoptive family, and from her piano playing. The country is in decay, the redwood forests are being cut down, her adoptive father is dead of alcoholism, her musical talents seem merely an excuse for her to be shown off like a trained monkey. The only genuine person in her life is her Aunt Geneva, a typically offbeat Lanford Wilson character with a good heart and a talent for unconventional remarks. When the ex-soldier reappears, Geri metaphorically finds her way home once again with his help, discovering the truth about her father and rediscovering herself as an artist.

The play works gracefully on several levels. Realistically, it tells a story of interesting, unusual, yet fully credible characters. Symbolically, it is a fairy tale about a child lost in the woods, finding her identity through the aid of a wild man of the forest, who at first seems threatening but who turns out to be a friend and guide. Allegorically, the play is about America in the post-Vietnam War era, struggling to

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regain its sense of identity and idealism in a time of selfishness and vulgarity. America is, after all, a land of immigrants like Geri, and, after the trauma of the useless war, all of us are trying to find our fathers—the founding fathers who established the country as a land of opportunity and hope. I have complained in the past about Lanford Wilson's refusal to concern himself with issues beyond the purely personal. Here he has written the best play yet about the Vietnam War, the great moral issue of his generation.

Jeff Daniels and Debra Monk gave strong, palpable performances as the veteran and the aunt. Sung Yun Cho was rather shrill and limited as Geri, but then it was no doubt difficult finding a teen-aged Amerasian actress who could play the piano! Marshall Mason, who has staged most of Wilson's work over the past two decades, directed with his usual skill; John Lee Beatty's setting recalled the enchanted forest of Walt Disney's classic *Snow White*, creating the perfect atmosphere for this subtle, evocative play.

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BERT CARDULLO

The Comfort of Strangers

ITALY IN GENERAL AND VENICE IN PARTICULAR have long fascinated English dramatists, from Webster (*The Duchess of Malfi*, 1614) to Shelley (*The Cenci*, 1819) to Harold Pinter (*Betrayal*, 1978). That's not to say that writers of other nationalities have not conducted their own "romance" with Italy, only that the priggish reserve of the English seems especially drawn to its opposite number, the torrid abandon of the Italians. Shakespeare himself understood the dramatic appeal of an Italian setting with its built-in extremes of courtliness and corruption, luxuriance and decay, eroticism and reprisal. And Pinter takes up the Venetian theme for the first time, not in *Betrayal*, but in his greatest play, *The Homecoming* (1965), where a man and his wife visit his family in London after a week's vacation in Venice apparently designed to revive their failing marriage. The Venetian vacation doesn't work for them, just as it finally does not work for Colin and Mary, the two English lovers in Ian McEwan's novel *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), who have come to Venice on holiday in an attempt to decide whether to end or deepen their seven-year relationship.

Pinter, also an accomplished scenarist, was the perfect choice to adapt McEwan's novel to the screen, less because of both authors' attraction to Venice than because of their interest in the same themes: (sexual) dominance and subservience, the darkness and brutality lurking not only outside our doors but also inside the most ordinary of us, and the fundamental elusiveness of much human behavior. This last theme leads both men to write in an elliptical style that, even when ostensibly candid, eschews explanation or exposition and that, in Pinter's case, is heightened by his use not only of silence but also of incantatory language.

If Pinter was the ideal choice to write the screenplay for *The Comfort of Strangers*, Paul Schrader initially seems to be a less-than-ideal choice for its director. The product of a strictly Calvinistic background, he has said that "the common thread that runs through all my films is redemption, a belief in God, a belief that something must be sacrificed [in order to reach God]." While this is true of such films of Schrader's as *Hardcore* (1979) and *American Gigolo* (1980)—both of which deal with the subject of prostitution—it is also true that his cinematic style has been archly cool, detached, affectless, as if the director were attempting to transcend the very material he had deigned to treat.

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That is largely the style he brings to *The Comfort of Strangers*, and it meshes beautifully with McEwan's understated, amoral tale.

The Comfort of Strangers tells the story of Mary and Colin, she an actress whose women's theatre group has just broken up over the issue of male membership, he someone who works in publishing. Even though these two have been lovers for seven years and Mary is legally divorced, they do not live together and no longer have a great passion for each other; when they talk of sex, it is of the *politics* of sex, not of their sexual relations. This is the second time Colin and Mary have chosen to vacation in Venice, so obviously the city has some appeal for them at the same time that it unfortunately has come to represent the stagnancy of their relationship—that is, until they meet Robert and Caroline.

Robert is an Italian who learned his English in London, where he grew up (his father was a diplomat), and who is married to a Canadian, Caroline. They reside in a sumptuous apartment, art-filled and book-lined, in a house that had once belonged to Robert's grandfather. Before we see Robert, we see his photographs of Colin and Mary, which he secretly takes as they walk about Venice, and which appear on screen as black-and-white stills that interrupt or break up the couple's stroll. Caroline and her husband have adorned one of their bedroom walls with pictures of the extremely handsome Colin (Mary is either not in the photographs or has been cut off at the hand, the elbow, or some insignificant portion of her face), which they use to stimulate their lovemaking. In fact Colin has unwittingly brought this involuntarily childless couple close together again, by which I mean that he has enabled them to make love in a conventional way after a long episode of sadomasochistic sex that had culminated in Caroline's hospitalization with a broken back, and that would have led to her death had Robert's beatings continued.

As Caroline puts it in the novel, "If you are in love with someone, you would even be prepared to let them kill you, if necessary." Pinter's script breaks this line off after the word "prepared" in order to let the actress playing Caroline suggest on screen what McEwan has spelled out in hard prose, just as this actress is later called upon to insinuate what the novelist himself has only insinuated: that instead of killing Caroline in the name of love, Robert will, with his wife's complicity, be "sensible" and sacrifice a beautiful man to their love, first through framing him in a number of still photographs, then by murdering him. Why sacrifice a man instead of a woman? Because Robert is as attracted to men as Caroline is—his "hobby" is a gay bar he owns in Venice, where he enjoys being alone with males—an attraction that is fueled by his abhorrence of strong women in general and feminists in particular.

From earliest childhood, the world Robert saw was made by his imperious father, of whom everyone was afraid (his mother, his four sisters) *except* Robert, who was his favorite. Yet the only son was closest

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to his tender mother, in whose bed he slept when his father was away. And the combination of male and female, or in any event of heterosexual and homosexual, we see in his character is symbolized by a lapidarian account Robert gives of his father just once in the novel but three times in the film (in voice-over at the start, to Colin and Mary soon after he meets them, and to the police at the very end), so that it becomes a kind of mantra to his identity:

> My father was a very big man. All his life he wore a black moustache. When it turned grey he used a little brush to keep it black, such as ladies use for their eyes. Mascara.

Robert tells this story to Colin and Mary at his bar, where he has taken them for drinks after arranging to intercept the couple one evening as they wandered, lost, through Venice's dark and labyrinthine streets. Finding (stalking?) them on the street again the next morning, he invites them to his apartment. There they meet Caroline, there Caroline talks to Mary about love and death and her husband makes derogatory comments to Colin about women—after which, suddenly, unprovoked, and unanswered, Robert punches his guest in the stomach. There also Mary sees a photograph of Colin among a group of photos taken by Robert that he shows to her; Caroline launders her visitors' clothes while they nap but playfully refuses to give them back unless the couple agrees to stay for dinner, which they do; and Caroline admits to Mary that she observed her and Colin sleeping naked.

The cumulative effect of this series of incidents, paradoxically, is to awaken Mary and Colin's sexual desire for each other. After they emerge from Robert and Caroline's apartment, they go back to their hotel room and barely leave it for four days, so busy are they making love and exulting in their renewed passion. But that renewal has its dark side: not only does Colin and Mary's visit to the luxury flat arouse their dormant libidos, it also unearths a sadomasochistic component in their relationship. A benign sadomasochism in comparison with Robert and Caroline's, but a form of sadomasochism nonetheless:

> MARY: I'm going to hire a surgeon—a very handsome surgeon—to cut off your arms and legs. And then you'll be quite helpless, you see. I'll keep you in a room in my house . . . and use you just for sex, whenever I feel like it. And sometimes I'll lend you to my girlfriends . . . and they can do what they like with you . . .
>
> . . .
>
> COLIN: I'm going to invent a machine . . . made of steel. It's powered by electricity. It has pistons and controls. It has straps and dials. It makes a low hum . . . like this . . . (*He*

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> *hums.*) And you'll be strapped in . . . quite securely . . . tight . . . and the machine will fuck you—not just for hours and weeks but for years and years and years. For ever.

Not long after making these statements, Mary tells Colin about the photograph of him she saw at Robert and Caroline's apartment, Colin tells her of the punch in the stomach Robert gave him, and they board a launch for a pleasure trip—only to get off at Robert and Caroline's stop, as if drawn back to this couple's parlous sensuality for reasons they can but dimly comprehend.

They are almost immediately spotted by Caroline from her balcony and waved up, to be greeted by Robert's "We were expecting you sooner." Caroline says that she and her husband are going on holiday, but not only have they packed all their suitcases, they've also sold off the contents of their apartment. In addition, Robert is selling his bar to its manager and says he must go there to complete the deal; he takes Colin along, ignoring the Briton's questions about the photograph Mary had seen, touching him frequently, and telling his gay friends that Colin is his lover. While they are gone, Caroline serves Mary drugged tea as she matter-of-factly summarizes her sadomasochistic relationship with Robert, shows off their bedroom photographic shrine to Colin, and awaits her husband's return. By the time the men come back, Mary is too far gone to warn Colin as the couple approaches him for the kill, with Caroline stroking him and Robert manhandling him before abruptly slitting his throat with a razor. While Colin bleeds to death slumped against a wall, Caroline and Robert passionately kiss each other and Mary drifts off into troubled, interminable sleep.

The murderers are quickly apprehended, largely because of their seemingly willful carelessness, their apparent desire to be caught and punished. Caroline and Robert are separated for good at the end of *The Comfort of Strangers,* each one sitting alone in a small interrogation room, each waiting to be put inside a prison cell. And it is as if they have wanted their own separation but could not effect it in any other way, have wanted to end the sadomasochistic relationship that signals their love-hate feelings toward each other as well as toward themselves. Something similar could be said about Colin and Mary: that the budding sadomasochistic element in their relationship is a sign of each one's love-hatred for the opposite sex in addition to equal parts of self-loathing and self-absorption.

Mary likes Caroline, and one reason is that she understands Caroline's desire to be hurt by men. Mary is treated by the police as if somehow she had acceded to Colin's slaying or at the very least been tainted by it, and this is because there is a part of her that curses the existence of men, that would have the lot of them—not merely those guilty of (sexual) violence against women—castrated or even exterminated. It is this part of her that resists remarriage, that puts off Colin

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right before their second visit to Robert and Caroline's when he suggests that they move in together and make a commitment. Mary has just been for a swim when Colin declares his total love for her, and the peaceful loneness of that swim only reinforces her desire to remain single. Even as, in the words of Cesare Pavese that McEwan uses as one of two epigraphs to his novel, "[Travelling] forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends," marriage would force Mary to trust a man, essentially a stranger to her sex, and dwell simultaneously "in two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons." These lines, from the poem "Sibling Mysteries" by Adrienne Rich, make up McEwan's other epigraph and succinctly express the idea of female estrangement in a man's world—a world from which women are nevertheless obliged to seek comfort (even when it comes in the form of pain), just as travelers are from their foreign hosts. By the end of *The Comfort of Strangers*, Mary is all alone, sundered forever from Colin's world and from the world of Caroline and Robert, whose own sundering will never again afford them the comfort of each other's strangeness.

Paul Schrader's cinematic style mirrors the attraction-repulsion of the sexes in *The Comfort of Strangers*. On the one hand, the camera is removed from the action, staying mostly in the medium-to-full range and opting at times for an overhead view of the action, just as McEwan's prose seems "removed" in its matter-of-fact or dispassionate recounting of increasingly bizarre events. On the other hand, the camera moves a lot—as if it were a voyeur magnifying Robert's own role as voyeur, yet not exactly adopting or advocating his point of view. This quality of motion, and hence of pursuit, is missing from McEwan's prose, which dwells on the narrative without giving the simultaneous impression that it must track down or stalk the characters along with their world.

That Venetian world, with its labyrinthine interiors as well as exteriors, is photographed by Dante Spinotti in a way that makes it appear at once inviting and forbidding, shimmering and shadowed, profuse and pallid. And Angelo Badalamenti's score, mostly for flute but occasionally for guitar, manages to suggest the Byzantine quality of Venice and the story taking place there at the same time that it acts as a momentary, melodic balm to our troubled senses. As for the performances of the principals—Rupert Everett (Colin), Natasha Richardson (Mary), Helen Mirren (Caroline), and Christopher Walken (Robert)—it need only be said that they understand, or have been helped to understand by Schrader, the subtlety called for in the acting of such superficially smooth but intrinsically scabrous characters. Walken, in particular, uses his sonorous voice, and lets the camera use his androgynous face, to suggest a figure of menacing politeness coupled with chilling sexuality.

Like *The Comfort of Strangers*, *La Belle Noiseuse* features two couples,

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the older of whom hosts the younger yet both of whom feed off each other, although in Jacques Rivette's film the hosts' motive is less sadomasochistic than, let us say, sadoartistic. Rivette has freely adapted *La Belle Noiseuse* from Balzac's story "The Unknown Masterpiece" (1831), transposing it from the seventeenth century to the present, adding characters as well as altering the role of others, changing the ending, and giving during the film's four hours—as only the cinema can do—the experience of real time, of duration, in the creative process of painting a picture. But Rivette's aim is similar to Balzac's, and different from that of the numerous bio-pics which romanticize the (historical) artist as tortured genius[1]: to dramatize in a sober way the dangers and the triumphs that every artist courts in attempting to achieve the goal of art, which, even for the realist, is not merely to copy nature, but to express it.

Rivette has structured four of his (often very long) films around the rehearsals of plays: *Paris Belongs to Us* (1957), *L'Amour Fou* (1968), *Out One* (1971), and *L'Amour Par Terre* (1984). As Pirandello knew, the theatre (being a naturally reflexive form) is more concerned with questions of illusion and reality, lies and truth, than any other art, and Rivette's characters in these films sort out the painful truth about themselves in the process of arduously preparing plays for performance. In *La Belle Noiseuse*, the theatrical rehearsals of the previous films are replaced by painting "rehearsals": ink or charcoal sketches of a clothed model, then of that same model naked; sketches of the model's whole body, only of her back, only of her face; one posing after another until, finally, the artist is ready to put oil to canvas. But, as in Rivette's "theatrical" films, the characters undergo a crucible during the artistic process, and here that crucible is connected to the crisis of representational painting subsequent to the invention of cinema: the need to demonstrate that, because the artist's vision is unmediated by a camera, a realistic canvas can capture the essence or soul of its subject whereas a film cannot, despite the ease with which it is able to manipulate light and space, color and mass.

In cinematic style and subject, *La Belle Noiseuse* resembles the six "comedies and proverbs" of Eric Rohmer, which explore the interiority of women who fall in love with essences as opposed to surfaces. These films do so with a camera concerned to preserve the integrity of space—that is, with a camera that relies on the long take, the full shot, and deep focus, and that cuts mostly to suggest discord between

[1] I am thinking, of course, of such movies as *Lust for Life* (1956), about van Gogh, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), about Michelangelo, and the recent *Camille Claudel* (1990), in which the ubiquitous Gérard Depardieu appears as Rodin. Three notable exceptions to the formulaic bio-pic about great painters are Georgy Shengelaya's *Pirosmani* (1971), Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986), and Maurice Pialat's *Van Gogh* (1991). Like bio-pics, these films treat the artist's life, but they do so with subtlety and insight. Unlike *La Belle Noiseuse, Pirosmani, Caravaggio,* and *Van Gogh* do not depict the agonizing process of creation itself.

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characters, preferring to track in when it wishes to intensify our view of someone or to pull back when it wants to enhance our perspective on a scene. Such a cinematic style is, of course, ideally suited to a film about painting,[2] about the protracted process of painting a picture—one stationary picture, on one continuous space—and its torturous effect on artist, model, lover.

The writer Marianne (Balzac gives her no profession or occupation) is not the painter-protagonist Frenhofer's literal lover in *La Belle Noiseuse*, but she is his figurative one in the sense that, by modeling for him, she restores his creative potency after ten years of inactivity punctuated by bouts of self-portraiture. Marianne's voice-over begins and ends the film, like Robert's in *The Comfort of Strangers*, not to indicate that the narrative will be told from her point of view, but to underline her pivotal role in the action: here, as the object of both the camera's and Frenhofer's revelatory gaze rather than as the author of that gaze, as in Robert's case. In the story it is Marianne's boyfriend, the aspiring young artist Nicolas,[3] who gets the emphasis along with Porbus, whom Rivette turns from a court painter into Frenhofer's dealer. In addition to shifting the focus from Nicolas to Marianne, Rivette gives Frenhofer a wife, Liz, a former architect whose life is now consumed by her relationship with her husband. Thus a nineteenth-century story, set in the seventeenth, about the nature of artistic creation becomes a twentieth-century film about the nature of artistic creation as it affects, not only artists, but also the women who live with, inspire, and even rival them.

La Belle Noiseuse is set in southeastern France, where the renowned Frenhofer lives with his wife in a large chateau. Frenhofer's last attempt to paint someone other than himself was a portrait of "La Belle Noiseuse," the sobriquet (out of Balzac) of a beautiful seventeenth-century courtesan named Catherine Lescault. The term translates as "the beautiful nuisance" or "the lovely pain in the ass," and it was Liz who posed for this unfinished masterpiece. She tells why her husband abandoned what was meant to be his crowning achievement: "Because Frenhofer loved me, he stopped painting me. It was either me or the painting." Along come Nicolas and Marianne, who are staying at a nearby country inn and who are escorted to Frenhofer's chateau by Porbus. Nicolas wishes both to pay his respects to the master and to find out what, if anything, he has been working on; Porbus wants his client to resume work on "La Belle Noiseuse," so that he can sell it; and both Nicolas and Porbus agree that Marianne should be Frenhofer's new model. She resists hotly at first, averse to

[2] This is also the style of Rivette's "theatrical" films, where its realism, its dependence on the long take and the full shot—which the cinema borrowed from the stage—seems equally appropriate.

[3] Significantly, the cinematic Nicolas works from photographs of his subjects—that is, from images made by a camera—not, like Frenhofer, from life.

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the idea of posing nude and possibly suspicious that her lover is merely trying to ingratiate himself with the famous artist. But she makes the decision to pose, almost in spite of herself, and Frenhofer, with Liz's approval, is moved to take up his "Noiseuse" again.

Over the next five days he paints his masterpiece in the studio Marianne compares to a cathedral, and the camera gives us shots of him working far more than it does of his beautiful model. Mostly we watch Frenhofer's hands at work, in real time that is occasionally elided by a series of jump cuts but more often by slow dissolves. We never catch more than a glimpse of the completed painting, and the fact that it is not unveiled to the mediating camera confirms for us the sacred mystery of art as contrasted with the profane erotics of Marianne's naked body on screen, no matter how sculpturally she is lit by the cinematographer, William Lubtchansky. Liz and Marianne separately view the finished "Belle Noiseuse," with Liz feeling betrayed that Frenhofer has painted it over the earlier painting of herself, and with Marianne reacting angrily at the extent to which the painting has exploited her soul (not her body), has exposed her essence. She nonetheless seems transformed by the experience, as does Frenhofer, who remarks to Liz that completing his masterpiece has "killed" him.

Frenhofer makes sure that nobody but his wife, Marianne, and posterity will see the finished work, which seems at once to please and distress him: he bricks it up behind a wall in his studio, then quickly paints another, less inspired "Noiseuse" that his dealer likes all the same. At the end of Balzac's "Unknown Masterpiece," the artist ends up mad and burns every one of his canvases, including "La Belle Noiseuse" (which no one sees, since he has concealed it beneath "a dead wall of paint"), before dying. Rivette's Frenhofer figuratively dies but literally lives to resume his shaken relationship with Liz, whom he has "betrayed" through his art, by "going all the way" with Marianne in the act of painting her. Frenhofer makes no sexual advances whatsoever toward his young model; still, she never quite sheds her resentment at his artistic "advances," never quite stops resisting them. This is one of the reasons he finds painting her such a challenge. Nicolas, for his part, is jealous of them both: of Frenhofer, for his fame and achievement as well as his communion with his naked subject; and of Marianne, for her growing independence as a woman and as an artist in her own right. Marianne's last word to Nicolas, and the last word of *La Belle Noiseuse*, is "No," after he has suggested that it is time they return to Paris, whose constant bustle and pervasive grayness inspire him if the quiet and color of the sunlit countryside do not.

For all its clarity, that color is densely photographed by Lubtchansky, and for all its gentleness, that quiet is framed by pulsing strains from Stravinsky's *Agon* and *Petrushka*. A similar dichotomy exists in the acting of Michel Piccoli, who plays Frenhofer with just the right

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counterpoise between world-weariness and artistic awakening, intellectual complacency and animalistic obstinacy.[4] The role of Frenhofer's wife is performed by the delicately spoken but undynamic Jane Birkin, who first got my attention as one of the two romping nude models in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966). David Bursztein, previously unknown to me, is acceptable as Nicolas, which is really all that he need be. It's Marianne who must be radiant, who must simultaneously radiate reluctance and curiosity, sensuality and discernment, self-assertion and self-denial. Emanuelle Béart does all this and more. She makes us long to look, not at her naked body, but at Frenhofer's *painting* of that body, at the "Belle Noiseuse" that captures the divine flame inside her in a way the cinema, forever hamstrung by the very technology that gives it its being, can only approximate.

[4] The hands we see painting are not Piccoli's but those of the artist Bernard Dufour.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Total Waugh

MARTIN STANNARD'S NOW COMPLETED BIOGRAPHY of Evelyn Waugh deserves saluting as an exemplary portrait of a man who was not only one of the most extravagant literary personalities ever invented but, just possibly, the premiere English novelist of our century.[1] Before pressing that second claim, some remarks are in order about why Mr. Stannard, in the new and the previous volume, is such a good biographer. One can say first that the research aspect of his enterprise looks impeccable: the people interviewed; the sources (libraries, newspapers, periodicals, private unpublished letters) widely drawn on and scrupulously acknowledged; the English terrain—Stannard is a lecturer at the University of Leicester—thoroughly and convincingly present. Beyond that he is a biographer who, after a decade of work and 1000 pages of the finished product, has managed to stay on good terms with his subject. While no starry-eyed fan of the great man, he avoids lecturing him, though he is quite willing to point out disparities between Waugh's version of an event and facts that contradict or qualify that version. Each chapter title is tagged with the relevant year and month span, so that at any moment a reader knows where he is temporally. Footnotes are conveniently placed at the bottom of the page—no thumbing to the back in an effort to figure out what goes with what. The index is helpful and the pictures—now glossy, unlike those in the first volume—are splendid.

What is more gratifying and seldom true even of substantial literary biographies, is the way this one smoothly works into its ongoing narrative relevant criticism of each of Waugh's books. Even when Stannard doesn't conduct a "reading" of the novel to hand, he manages to place it pertinently in its contemporary context. One illustrative example will do, apropos of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, Waugh's 1957 novel of aural hallucinations which came straight from his own horrible experience of hearing voices while on a shipboard cruise:

> The ease with which it translated into a successful radio play testifies to the quality of its structure and dialogue. Waugh's review

[1] EVELYN WAUGH: The Early Years 1903–1939, by *Martin Stannard*. W. W. Norton & Co. $24.95. EVELYN WAUGH: The Later Years 1939–1966, by *Martin Stannard*. W. W. Norton & Co. $29.95.

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> of *The Comforters* demonstrates his fascination with Spark's self-referential techniques and suggests that he was working along similar lines. The revision most assiduously tackled was that of the ending: converting it into the beginning of the book we have just read. Pinfold is thus both inside and outside his text and the tale repeats itself seamlessly. As with *Helena*, an argument can be made for *Pinfold* as a "postmodernist" novel. B. S. Johnson and Martin Amis (both of whose writings Waugh would have loathed) later used a similar mixture of fiction and autobiography.

Not only are these accurate remarks about Waugh's novel, but it is placed in relation to Muriel Spark and other novelists currently on the scene, and this can only be done by someone who knows the relevant books and writers to compare. To be guided through Waugh's life by both an active-minded explorer and a more than competent literary critic is a double satisfaction.

We're already familiar with much in Stannard's account of the life if we've read Waugh's letters and diaries, his unfinished autobiography, *A Little Learning* (only the first volume was completed), and the biography by his friend Gerald Sykes. Still this biography, especially the first volume, provides a satisfyingly full and evenhanded treatment of Waugh's troubled relations with his father, the bookman Arthur, and with his brother Alec who became a slickly professional writer. Evelyn, who despite such troubles seems to have had a genuinely happy childhood, was short, an indifferent athlete, delighting early on in the confusion and anarchy from which his early novels sprang. His friendships and sexual inclinations at Lancing and Oxford were largely directed within the male orbit; at Oxford he fell in love with Richard Pares and he became a member of the postwar generation of aesthetes and writers Martin Green has controversially labelled "Children of the Sun." After taking his degree he spent a desperate year teaching at a private school in Wales, evidently (from Stannard's description) a more ordinary establishment than the fantastic Llanabba Castle into which Waugh transformed it in *Decline and Fall* ("In Wales everybody has black spittle and whenever he meets you says 'borra-da' and spits," says an anthropological note from his *Diaries*). Things went from bad to worse: we are to understand from *A Little Learning* that he prepared a suicide note, carefully checked its quotation from Euripides, then walked into the Welsh seawater prepared, so it appears, to destroy himself. Such heroic aspirations (or were they really mock-heroic?) were foiled by an encounter with a party of jellyfish sufficiently bothersome to take the fun out of the caper. Waugh headed back to shore, felt like an ass, and proceeded to get on with his life.

For a time this meant drinking everything in sight, especially at visits back to Oxford and environs. Fortunately, on one of those

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Oxford visits he drunkenly exited a room through its window, fell, and severely sprained an ankle.[2]

His friends carted him back to Golders Green, the Waugh homestead, and there he spent three days convalescing, browsing in Arthur's library and discovering the pre-Raphaelites: Holman Hunt, Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. After some delaying he received through the agency of Anthony Powell—who was working at Duckworth and soliciting Oxford talent for the firm—an offer for a book on Rossetti to coincide with the centenary of that artist's birth.[3] *Rossetti* appeared in 1928 to good notices; the career was launched. By September 1930, two years and some months later (he was now twenty-six), Waugh had published two novels (*Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*) and completed his most delightful travel book, *Labels*. He had also married and been separated from Evelyn Gardner ("She-Evelyn") who left him for a man named John Heygate, thereafter referred to by Waugh as "the basement boy," and the model for John Beaver in *A Handful of Dust*. He had also been received into the Roman Catholic Church.

His assumptions about literary art had by now taken shape and are described well by Stannard:

> Waugh's attitudes were, and remained, those of the artist-craftsman. Writer, painter, printer, carpenter—the object of all their labours was to produce useful, pleasurable, well-wrought objects. . . . A writer's business was not to confess or proselytise or to render the states of heightened consciousness of sensitive introverts; it was to entertain and to inform.

[2] The *Diaries* are filled with dipsomaniacal adventures: "Next day I drank all the morning from pub to pub and invited to lunch with me at the New Reform John Sutro, Roger Hollis, Claud, and Alfred Duggan. I am not sure if there was anyone else. I ate no lunch but drank solidly and was soon in the middle of a bitter quarrel with the president—a preposterous person called Cotts—who expelled me from the club. Alfred and I then drank double brandies until I could not walk. He carried me into Worcester where I fell out of a window and then relapsed into unconsciousness punctuated with severe but well-directed vomitings. I dined four times at various places and went to a drunk party at Worcester in someone's rooms I did not know." Different window?

[3] Stannard quotes from Anthony Powell's memoirs in which Powell remembers being brought back by Evelyn for cold suppers at his parents' house: "On these pleasant North End Road evenings, Arthur Waugh would tell literary anecdotes at the dinner-table. Mrs. Waugh (whose quiet exterior suggested much inner firmness of purpose) scarcely speaking at all, slipping out at the first opportunity. When the company moved from the dining room Arthur Waugh might continue to chat for a minute or two, then also retire, probably to work. Waugh and I would sit and talk. I usually stayed until nearly midnight, when a last bus could be caught to the neighbourhood of Piccadilly." Those really *were* the days.

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In his never less than interesting reviews that began to appear increasingly in the 1930s he praised novelists like Ivy Compton-Burnett, Henry Green, and Norman Douglas, who seemed to him to entertain and inform in a craftsmanly way. (Interestingly enough, Hemingway was another favorite—as he was also for the early Anthony Powell.) During the 1930s he would produce three more novels, four books of travel, and a biography of Thomas Campion. The novels and travel books were consistently ignored by serious (too-serious?) periodicals like Eliot's *Criterion* and Leavis' *Scrutiny*. Not even the publication in 1934 of *A Handful of Dust*—a book that, Waugh said, contained all he had to say about "humanism," and which was a larger achievement than his previous novels—made a difference to literary high culture's assumption that this kind of fictional behavior wasn't in need of real criticism.

There is an odd parallel here with Wyndham Lewis' similar fortune during the decade, a time when Lewis produced his best novel, *The Revenge for Love*, mainly ignored by the critics. No two writers ever insisted more loudly on the primacy of the self, even though—in Waugh's case as a Catholic convert—that self was to be seen against a supernatural background. (It's appropriate also that two writers so infatuated by their own voices should have paid no attention at all to one another's genius.) Throughout the 1930s Lewis dramatized himself as The Enemy, even wrote a poem about it ("If So the Man You Are") and more than once confused his dramatized, exaggerated self with reality. There is an analogy with Waugh's increasing uncertainty, as in the 1940s he became a celebrated writer, about just what sort of self he was or indeed whether "he" had a self. On the occasion of his publishing *Work Suspended* in 1942—an unfinished story or novella which Stannard sees as the germ of his later more introspective, ruminative style, Edith Sitwell wrote that "It frightens me, too. By that I mean I am frightened by the condition that one has no idea of what one is really like." A telling remark as applied to Waugh, notes Stannard, since

> Waugh's image of "what he was really like" was becoming increasingly diffuse . . . his physical existence—his body, his clothes, the points at which he touched others' lives—had become correspondingly vague. Nothing attached him to the world. The space which might have been filled by a sense of "self" had become occupied by self-parody. . . . The ventriloquist's doll was working the master.

Again with reference to Lewis, it is apposite that Lewis' comic novel *Snooty Baronet* (1932) contains a tour de force in which the baronet confronts a store-window dummy that, Snooty decides, may just be more real than he is.

As Waugh lost faith in the rightness of England's—indeed Western Man's—cause in World War II (Stannard faithfully traces his incred-

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ibly complicated and disillusioning military career), his own sense of himself as a valid and significant husband, father, member-of-society, became intermittent. There are moments of satisfied self-congratulation, as on his thirty-ninth birthday when he confides to his diary that it has been "a good year":

> I have begotten a fine daughter, published a successful book, drunk 300 bottles of wine and smoked 300 or more Havana cigars. I have got back to soldiering among friends. . . . I get steadily worse as a soldier . . . but more patient and humble—as far as soldiering is concerned. I have about £7900 in hand and no grave debts except to the Government; health excellent except when impaired by wine; a wife I love; agreeable work in surroundings of great beauty. Well that is as much as one can hope for.

But much of the time it wasn't enough: "I have given up drunkenness for life. . . . It is a cutting of one of the few remaining strands that held me to human society," he wrote to his wife Laura a couple of years later. Stannard notes that when Waugh was clear-headed and others were imbibing he found their jokes and conversation disappointingly flat: "When drunk, Waugh could be amusingly offensive; sober, he was caustic and melancholy." Things didn't get better, necessarily, when he was by himself: "I dined alone sitting opposite a looking glass," he wrote to Nancy Mitford, "reflecting sadly that the years instead of transforming me into a personable man of middle age, have made me into a very ugly youth." How much in this observation is "self" and how much is self-parody? It appears that the ventriloquist's doll is indeed working its master. Over the three postwar years 1945–47, Waugh became—declares Stannard emphatically—an old man.

This didn't mean that stories of his behavior decline in their absolutely insupportable and irresistible outrageousness. One of them must suffice, concerning a young American writer-friend of Carl Van Vechten's. Van Vechten (best known for his novel, *Nigger Heaven*) had suggested that the young man—a Mr. Paul Moor—write to Waugh. Moor wrote, expecting nothing, but was instead graciously invited to Piers Court, Waugh's Gloucestershire home, and met at the train station by a hired limousine. When the front door was opened at Piers Court, a liveried butler greeted Moor and behind the butler appeared Waugh, " 'dressed for dinner, naturally, in an old-fashioned tuxedo, replete with dancing pumps embellished with dainty little gros-grain bows.' " Moor nervously awaited his idol's first words, which came as follows after " 'an elaborate reaction of exaggerated astonishment' ":

> " 'But I thought you'd be black! I don't understand. I thought all Carl Van Vechten's friends were black! What a disappointment! My wife and I had both counted on dining out for months to come on

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> our story of this great, hulking American coon who came to spend the week-end. Ah well.' Then he brightened, 'Don't dress for dinner if you don't want to.' He paused, then added, somewhat hesitantly, 'Ah—we always do.' "

Escorted to his room, Moor found affixed to the toilet in the adjoining bathroom a hand-lettered card: "The handle should return to the horizontal when the flow of water ceases. Should it fail to do so, agitate it gently until it succeeds. E. W." At dinner—in a scene which replays—though not quite so severely—the discomfiting of Mr. Salter at the dinner table at Boot Magna (in *Scoop*), Moor is about to have his wineglass filled when Waugh halts the butler, saying—as he gestures at a large jug on the sideboard—"I'm sure you'd prefer iced water." Later, looking ahead to breakfast, Waugh suggests to Moor that, as an American, he would probably prefer something like "Popsy Toasties" to a regular English breakfast. At one point Moor, thinking he is alone, sits down and plays a piece on the piano only to discover, after he has played for some minutes, Waugh's face at the window glaring in. Later at dinner Waugh confides in him that " 'I don't like music' and pausing for the proper formulation . . . 'I despise it.' " (Or as Waugh put it alternately during his memorable evening with the Stravinskys in New York City, "All music is positively painful to me.") And so on in this manner. Yet as the weekend drew to a close and Moor announced he would depart after Sunday lunch (expecting Waugh to be overjoyed), the host "appeared to be genuinely dismayed: 'Must you go? . . . Stay as long as you like.' " Moor carried away the impression of a " 'generous but enormously lonely man,' " and who is to say him nay? How much of it was the self speaking, or the ventriloquist's doll? Or how much of Waugh's perverse inclination to pull the carpet out from underneath his guest resulted in a comic inventiveness hard to distinguish from madness?

The last hundred pages of the biography, covering the final years culminating in Waugh's death in 1966, make painful if vivid reading. One thinks of Gerontion's lament as Waugh's: the old man in a dry month, his senses failing, may have come up with something like the famous question, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" In the 1940s, suffering from piles, he had an unnecessary (Stannard's word) and painful operation to correct the condition.[4] When he was nearly

[4] Christopher Sykes has a great account of this event: "Before going I asked about his illness and recovery. He told me that the operation had caused him much pain and that the consequent treatment was such as he could not bring himself to describe. I said I supposed that he was now relieved of much chronic pain and must be thankful it was over.

'No,' he said, 'the operation was not necessary, but might conceivably have become so later on.'

'Not necessary? Then why did you have it done?'

'Perfectionism.' "

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fifty he wrote John Betjeman that his memory was "not at all hazy . . . just sharp, detailed & dead wrong," and similarly imaginative prose memorializes his attempt to grow a beard: "At present it looks peculiarly repulsive—a mass of isolated, coarse hairs of variegated colouring, but it gives an interest as they say, like a pot plant or flower." His reckless combining of alchohol, bromide and chloral, in the interests of sound sleep, eventually led to the Pinfoldian hallucinations mentioned earlier, as a consequence of which he became convinced that he was possessed by the devil. When Ann Fleming visited him a year or so before he died, she found him in a "dolorous condition" and later wrote, asking him whether he had seen a dentist: "I did not see a toothbrush in your bedroom, do you use one?" Waugh proceeded to have his remaining teeth extracted. The catalogue of various relations between him and his six children has to be read to be believed. At about the same time Laura is quoted as saying to her eldest son Auberon ("Bron"), "You see that dreadful old bore . . . he used to be so witty and gay." Stannard puts it simply: "He wanted to die. All pleasure in his domestic life had evaporated."

What about the enduring value of Waugh's novels—how high a claim should be made for them? Stannard doesn't finally settle down to have his say on the question, although his admiration for the work, both pre- and postwar, is everywhere evident. The main critical issue as it has emerged is whether the postwar books, beginning with *Brideshead Revisited*, are a falling-off from the brilliant entertainments that ended with *Put Out More Flags* (1942). (*The Loved One*, 1948, is a partial return to that earlier way of creation.) Edmund Wilson much admired the early comedies but found *Brideshead* often bathetic, and—although he didn't suggest that Waugh revert to his earlier satiric practices—was unhappy with the new attempt at seriousness. More recently Martin Green has written admiringly about Waugh as a major artist but finds that major quality to be present only in the books where "delight" is uppermost, where Waugh doesn't identify with his protagonists but uses them as vehicles for an amoral, comic inventiveness. By contrast, in the *Sword of Honour* war trilogy, in *Brideshead*, even in—so Green would have it—*A Handful of Dust*, Waugh gives us heroes whom we are asked to take seriously, and this he cannot do without making the books relatively dull, lacking in his truest creative spirit. That was also Kingsley Amis's point when, in reviewing the latter two volumes of the trilogy, he lamented that Waugh had repressed his earlier, anarchic energies in favor of less superficial concerns.

There is a lot to be said for such a critical take on Waugh's literary career; indeed I was once committed to it. A rereading of *Sword of Honour* (in the handsome single-volume final version published in England by Chapman & Hall the year before Waugh died) has made for a change of mind and a conviction that the trilogy was a bright deed in the darkening world of Waugh's last fifteen years. Martin

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Green has strong words about what fuels the novels that lack delight—"a dull obsessive resentable painfulness, as the good characters fail, the bad ones succeed, vitality diminishes, brilliance fades and tarnishes, gaiety dwindles and cracks—all with a mechanical and masochistic predictability." The assumption is, and I don't share it, that Waugh couldn't write convincingly about Guy Crouchback's failure and diminished vitality; that, compared to Basil Seal—the rogue hero of *Black Mischief* and *Put Out More Flags*—Guy is very much a dull dog and a Catholic one to boot. Certainly nobody would deny that *Sword of Honour*, especially in the second volume (originally published as *Officers and Gentlemen*) has its "flats" (as Dryden said of *Paradise Lost*), but they are allowable in an extended work that needn't maintain a high pitch of comic presentation. (There is, it should be emphasized, plenty of comedy in the trilogy overall.) Stannard points out, as have other recent critics of Waugh,[5] that Guy's progress over the long work (Green might call it rather a dwindling and cracking) is toward a depressed realization that his earlier fervent embrace of the war as a sacred mission was desperately, even criminally, mistaken. When, in the incident near the close of the trilogy (section eleven, "Unconditional Surrender") Guy attempts to help some Jewish refugees out of Yugoslavia, the following memorable exchange occurs with a Madame Kanyi who will later be executed by the Partisans for her role in assisting Guy. Madame Kanyi says that

> "It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied with war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. . . . I knew Italians—not very many perhaps—who felt this. Were there none in England?"
>
> "God forgive me," said Guy. "I was one of them."

This is worth a good deal more than yet another comic turn, however delightful, from a writer who had won his spurs already in that competition.

Sword of Honour has been compared to Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, and Ford's tetralogy is even spoken of as an unacknowledged influence on Waugh, especially in Ford's hero Christopher Tietjens, stubbornly plugging away at his outmoded beliefs, betrayed by his wife and shabbily treated by some of his comrades. But there's no indication Waugh ever took the slightest notice of Ford's work (though they both started out as pre-Raphaelites) and anyway the differences in tone and treatment between the two war novels are immense. Furthermore, *Parade's End* opens with Ford's finest piece of

[5] See Michael Gorra, *The English Novel at Mid-Century* (New York, 1990), pp. 188–194.

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sustained fiction, *Some Do Not*, but goes downhill from then on. By contrast Waugh's *Sword* builds slowly, too slowly for some, ending with something substantial having been created, no more nor less than the fact of loss—"lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties," to quote Matthew Arnold's words about Oxford.

One of the minor unfortunate consequences of George Orwell's untimely death in 1949 was that he never wrote the essay he planned to on Waugh's fiction (Waugh admired *Animal Farm* and, with some reservations, *1984*). But Orwell did leave a few interesting sentences in a notebook, suggesting the tack of the unwritten essay and beginning "The advantages of not being part of the movement, irrespective of whether the movement is in the right direction or not. But disadvantage in holding false (indefensible) positions." For Orwell it was mainly Waugh's Catholicism that was indefensible ("One cannot really be Catholic & grown-up," Orwell asserted, as if John Henry Newman had never existed). He concluded that "Waugh is abt as good a novelist as one can be (i.e. as novelists go today) while holding untenable opinions." As novelists go today, fifty years later, Waugh looks better than good, his work from *Decline and Fall* through *Sword of Honour* an endlessly re-readable trove of brilliant comedy and unbrilliant, even depressed, realism. The premiere English novelist of this century? I can't think of any, including D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, who is more repaying.

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BRIAN COX

Shakespeare's Myth

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW IN *PN REVIEW* (Jan–Feb. 1993) Ted Hughes, the British Poet Laureate, explained some of the basic ideas which underlie his extraordinary new book about Shakespeare.[1] His remarks throw fascinating light on his own aims as a poet; his Shakespeare book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand Hughes. Whether it is helpful to our understanding of Shakespeare is another matter.

Hughes surprised many admirers when in 1984 he agreed to accept the position of Poet Laureate. His recent collection, *Rain-Charm for the Duchy* (1992), brings together the poems he has written in his laureate role. The general view is that some of these transcend their function as occasional poems written for public events, and that they include at least two or three of his best. In the *PN Review* interview he explains that he is "more than a monarchist" in that he has "always had the belief that the symbol of royalty is an essential expression of psychological unity, psychological wholeness." Kings and Queens are invented from the dreams of ordinary people, and provide an essential center for a community. Hughes is obsessed by the overwhelming importance of myth for both individuals and societies. At Cambridge he abandoned the study of literary criticism which, he says, was inflicting "terrible damage" on his true identity. He took up anthropology, and even in his earliest poems, leading images reflect his absorption in myth. In his famous "Hawk Roosting," for example, the hawk gives a straight monologue as the Egyptian hawk, Horus. In the *PN Review* interview, Hughes explains that Horus is "the immortal hawk who is the eye of the sun, who flies through all hawks, or who absorbs all hawks."

For this huge book on Shakespeare he chooses as epigraph a quotation from Yeats:

> The Greeks, a certain scholar has told me, considered that myths are the activities of the Daimons, and that the Daimons shape our characters and our lives. I have often had the fancy that there is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought. ("At Stratford-on-Avon: Ideas of Good and Evil.")

[1] SHAKESPEARE AND THE GODDESS OF COMPLETE BEING, by *Ted Hughes*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $35.00.

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Hughes believes he has unlocked the central myth which explains all Shakespeare did and thought. He tells us that it is shallow to see Shakespeare as an opportunist, exploiting a variety of themes and stories and characters to create great drama. His plays dominate the imagination of centuries of theatergoers because they reflect "a sacred symbolic language," which proves to be "phenomenonally consistent": "it is a code, and much of it can be cracked."

Sceptical readers, and I am one of them, will immediately deduce that there is something narrow and obsessive about a "code" which almost entirely excludes *Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night* or the Histories. There are moments when Hughes himself acknowledges that what he calls his "Tragic Equation" fits uneasily onto the plays. When discussing *Measure for Measure*, for example, Isabella, on the mythic plane, is supposed to reflect Lucrece, the purity which Angelo desires to rape. When Isabella pitilessly rejects her brother's plea for his life she no longer fits the limited mythical pattern Hughes has imposed on her. He comments ruefully: "Her role as afflicted Goddess seems to have wavered somewhat." Hughes often makes such acknowledgements, and he then endeavors with considerable imaginative ingenuity to fit the diverse strands of Shakespeare's drama into his Tragic Equation.

Hughes argues with the sceptics. The more evident weakness in his idea, he says, will appear to many Shakespearians as the "too wilful ignoring of the all-important bulk of fine and vital distinctions which constitute the life of the characters and the unique, prismatic, iridescent actuality of the texts." He says he yields to nobody in cherishing these fine distinctions. But he presents his mythic Tragic Equation as "an image of the fixed world that gives consistency to these elements of the 'free' world which are open to all the interpretations that new minds can bring to them." "The relationship between the two," he says, "is like that between an evolving species and the individual animals that express it and without which it could not physically exist." Hughes challenges his readers to ask why Shakespeare's tragedies have earned their place beside those of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. It is not enough, he says, that they are "dense with realistic understanding of secular man." They qualify for that great fraternity, he argues, because they operate on the mythical plane, because they embody a vision of sacred man, or of falling and fallen man in a sacred universe.

The key to Shakespeare's mythical imagination is explained by Hughes in a postscript called "The Boar with a Flower in its Mouth." The two myths at the root of his work are those of the Great Goddess and the sacrificial God. Hughes contends that these myths are expressed with extraordinary force in "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece." The Great Goddess, who is embodied in Venus, is rejected by Adonis because he recoils from her sensuality. He is subsequently killed by the charging boar, which represents lust.

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Adonis becomes a type of the rational, moral intelligence, which splits the Goddess into the Queen of Hell (the Boar) and Lucrece, the pure woman, and rejects both. Adonis wants to perpetuate his judgemental system of right love and wrong love (like Angelo's "strict statutes and most biting laws") by annihilating or neutralizing the Queen of Hell, and by preserving Lucrece in a nunnery (or its equivalent, "married chastity"). Lucrece embodies a purity which remains perpetually available to the hero, radiating a beam of redemption through the darkness towards him, as Helena redeems Bertram in *All's Well* or Imogen redeems Posthumus in *Cymbeline*. Hughes's summary of the coded myth is as follows:

> The Queen of Hell's Boar . . . embodies the system's entire regenerative power—all the elemental, magnetic, physical power of the reunion. . . . Since its whole nature is the will to recombine at any cost, this third heavenly body moves first to repossess the source of disruption and disunion, and after that the source of the light, the repository of the light. Which is to say, the Boar has only one metaphysical purpose: to repossess Adonis, and, having recombined with him (albeit in violence, creating that fourth dramatis persona Tarquin), then to reclaim, in violence again, Lucrece, so restoring (though violently, scattering the human puppets) the Divine Union. The final state, therefore, like the first, is perfect union in Divine Love. . . .
>
> One can see that the linear form of the Tragic Equation takes full account of this disintegration of primal matter and order . . . and of the reunion in violence (Tarquin's rape, murder or usurpation, the crime of his "madness"). Explosion to implosion—like a supernova.
>
> When this cycle of "repossession" is completed in violence (*Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Coriolanus*) it is Tragedy pure if not simple. When Shakespeare finds a way of nursing the hero and heroine through that implosion, bringing them out "reborn" into the new wholeness, it does turn out that they are back in the union of Divine Love (with some earthly qualifications), which is Tragedy redeemed by Theophany (briefly in *King Lear*, subjectively in *Antony and Cleopatra*, substantially in the last four plays).
>
> This is another way of putting what I described at the end of the discussion of *Othello* as the *perpetuum mobile* of the Tragic Equation. The formula maps the full cycle within which Divine Love is first made to destroy itself in its human vessels (the tragedies), and then by destroying one anomalous form of human vessel (the limiting, "Puritan" ego) to create for itself a greater form of containment (the redeemed hero's love). But the main point here is that throughout these dramas the active Divine Love enters the action, according to the Equation, in the form of the Boar.

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The myth of "Venus and Adonis" is connected by Hughes to the great conflict in Elizabethan times between Catholicism and Protestantism: "The new Christ, Adonis, seems to be rejecting the Catholic Church, personified in the poem by the Great Love Goddess as a whore." When Shakespeare was born, two thirds of the country (including his mother and most probably his father too) had been Catholics, worshipers, in Hughes's language, who took seriously the cult of the sacrificed God and the Great Goddess. Numbers of them, even in the 1590s (including one of his own distant relatives) were ready to be martyred for their belief that the myth was absolutely true.

Hughes sees Shakespeare's plays as prophetic, his string of regicides (Richard III, Macbeth, Brutus, Edmund) foretelling the execution of Charles I. Like the great Greek tragedians, Shakespeare lived in a society where "the archaic reign of the Great Goddess was being put down, finally and decisively, by a pragmatic, sceptical, moralizing, desacralizing spirit: in Greece by the spirit of Socrates, and in England by the spirit of the ascendant, Puritan God of the individual conscience, the Age of Reason cloaked in the Reformation."

For Hughes the myth is a fundamental constant in the plays:

> The Female as the Goddess of Divine Love is identified, in occult fashion, with the hero's own soul: this is a fact which the hero both knows and does not know.
>
> He apprehends the truth about the nature of the Goddess, which is that she is herself half . . . enigmatic, daemonic animal, but intellectually he rejects the implication that his soul is the same. His intellectual rejection of that unwanted half of the Goddess, and thereby that unwanted half of himself (and of life), is the tragic error from which his (and her) tragic fate explodes. . . .
>
> Those innocent forms, of Goddess and Adonis, are the raw materials, the *prima materia*, of the Mythic Equation. But the Equation only becomes active as a process of tragic consequences when the Puritan eye is opened in Adonis, either by the Female's real action (Cressida, Hamlet's mother) or more usually by Adonis becoming deluded (Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Posthumus, Leontes). This is the catalytic ingredient which, after *Measure for Measure*, is unfailingly added in some form or other, always with calamitous or at least highly dramatic results.

These theories are conveyed by Hughes with much repetition, and the book would have been better if it had been half its considerable length. The "Tragic Equation" is mentioned *ad nauseam*, and Shakespeare's drama is often reduced to an algebraic formula. When Hughes discusses the "transcendental plane," as the Tragic Equation is "dismantled" in the last plays through atonement and rebirth, he resorts to diagrams. When we are told that A1 has become A2, B2,

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CT, DT and ET, or that Shakespeare has "zoomed in on that essential act and the Tragic Equation is a close-up of its psycho-biology, projected into sequential form," denoted by the formula, this will seem to many readers to be far too reductive and prescriptive.

The real test of the theory is to be found in Hughes's examination of individual plays. These are continually illuminating and exciting, even when, for sceptics, the total theory is suspect. My reading experience was always of this double kind. Hughes is obviously right when he insists that Shakespeare's dramas cannot be narrowed into a simple realistic framework. In Angelo, Othello or Leontes the reaction to the idea of female lust is both psychologically realistic and hugely irrational. According to Hughes, the hero's hysterical rejection of female sexuality is the last-ditch violent resistance before he surrenders to his own lust. In *All's Well* Bertram's cold rejection of Helena does not contradict his lustful pursuit of Diana, but is psychologically linked to it. In *Measure for Measure,* Angelo's frigid legalistic suppression of sexual license is a logical overture to his own reckless plunge into sexual crime. In the more "mature" tragedies, in *Hamlet* or *Othello,* this act of lust is seen by Hughes as modulating into some form of banishment or else murder, and it evolves thereafter through variations of a madness which always ends in the destruction (or the attempted destruction) of the Female. Hughes's analyses of *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are particularly compelling, difficult to summarize because with these two plays the Tragic Equation often gives way to personal, highly original responses to Shakespeare's text.

Prospero is seen by Hughes as the one tragic hero, in the whole tragic sequence, who does not go through the madness and the Tarquinian crime. He is an Adonis figure, a standard potential tragic figure who has rejected the Queen of Hell (Sycorax) to a great distance, and confronted her offspring the Boar (Caliban). Prospero stands his ground and overcomes the Boar. Unlike the other plays, where Adonis is more or less demolished and supplanted by Tarquin, the play ritualizes Adonis' victory. But in this final play the act of transcendence is seen by Hughes as only provisional; for one individual in only one place, in this case Shakespeare for a decade either side of the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The last paragraph of the book reads:

> Otherwise, the Boar is at large, seething with undiminished potential, full of visions and attended by that crying voice, but full, also, of "jealous" fury, the rage of the rejected Goddess, who continues to whisk her sea-monsterish tempest tails around the island stage.

The tone of these final words reflects the whole book, a strange mixture of obsessive conviction and imaginative response to Shakespeare's genius.

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DEAN FLOWER

Politics and the Novel

AMONG THE MANY GIFTS OF JULIAN BARNES as a novelist, the one most often forgotten or neglected by his admiring critics has been compassion. Barnes is so original and so ingenious in his narrative inventions—as any reader of *Flaubert's Parrot* or *The History of the World in 10½ Chapters* knows—that he tends to dazzle. He can even be dazzling in his moral seriousness, giving depth and range to apparently light entertainments like *Metroland* and *Talking It Over*. But his rarer gift is for selfless surrender to his characters. *Before She Met Me* is a disturbing *film noir* excursion into the obsessions of a jealous husband; *Staring at the Sun* recreates a vulnerable, uneducated woman's lifelong despair and resilience. Barnes's capacity to be *that* interested—in a character or in Flaubert's parrot or in Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*—has heretofore been proof of his moral strength.

But now that impulse may have played him false. His seventh novel is a 138-page political fable based on the recent collapse of Communism in Bulgaria.[1] The deposed leader, a prickly old tyrant called Stoyo Petkanov (modeled on Todor Zhivkov) proves to be the porcupine of Barnes's title. In a nationally televised trial, Petkanov is tried for the "crimes" of his regime. His chief prosecutor is Peter Solinsky, an anxious, fumblingly inept functionary *not* based on his real-life counterpart, Krasimir Zhekov. Barnes himself explains that his purpose was to "set the closed certainties of a Communist ideologue against the frailties and open certainties of his prosecutor." But it does not come out so sympathetically or evenhandedly as that.

Solinsky's frailties are harshly exposed; the trial is a sham, a media event; "freedom" is not an arduous "open certainty" so much as a buzz word of opportunistic journalists or callow students; without Communism the nation is adrift; the people are starving, worse off than before. And the embattled porcupine never runs out of quills. Petkanov's "closed certainties" turn out to be shrewd, principled, politically savvy. He clearly gets the last word in his contest with Solinsky: "If I am not [a monster], then I must be someone like you, or someone you might be capable of becoming." Barnes seems to have played devil's advocate to a fault. You begin to wonder if he would have defended *any* Communist dictator—just to see if it could be done. At the end of the novel Barnes's gaze lingers on a lot of sadly

[1] THE PORCUPINE, by *Julian Barnes*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.00.

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discarded Soviet statuary—including a huge bronze of *Eternal Gratitude to the Liberating Red Army*. The intention is heavily ironic: see how the liberator becomes the oppressor? But the effect, alas, is sentimental, an empathy both misplaced and shallow. It is heartening to learn (from Barnes himself, be it noted) that the prevailing local reaction to the novel has been, "No Bulgarian could have written this book."

Barnes is not alone. Nearly everybody wants to write political novels these days, or at least politically aware novels. But success in the genre tends to elude the direct attempt. As Irving Howe demonstrated long ago in *Politics and the Novel*, great political novels emerge out of a writer's "truly grasping imagination," not out of some notion of "relevance" or immediate confrontation. Isaac Singer's posthumous novel (*Scum* appeared one month before his death in 1991) provides a nice case in point.[2] Serialized in a Yiddish weekly in 1967 and now accessible in English for the first time, the novel depicts the desperate poverty of Jews in Warsaw in the winter of 1922. Yet the story is irrepressibly funny. Its first-person narrator, the son of a rabbi, is nineteen-year-old David Bedinger, who envisions becoming a famous writer. He arrives in Warsaw penniless, homeless, and shabby, equipped with a few books (which he sells at once) and an essay he has just written on Spinoza and the Cabala. He spends his first night sleeping—chastely—with Sonya, a shopgirl he hardly knows. Almost at once he is offered a coveted certificate authorizing his immediate emigration to Palestine—*if* he will agree to a "fictive marriage." The wealthy Minna Ahronson can travel on the certificate only if she is married; but she will pay for everything, and get a prompt divorce on arrival, just to be reunited with her fiancé in Palestine. Further complications ensue when David rents a tiny windowless room from two Communist women, the militant Bella and her pliant young niece Edusha.

Admired by Sonya, scorned by Minna, tantalized by Edusha, David suffers agonies of elation and depression. Like Saul Bellow's Augie March, he is jerked around by everyone, drawn into their woes, badgered. Through David's comic confusions Singer manages to convey a vivid sense of postwar Warsaw, with its welter of Zionists, Communists, Fascists, atheists, rabbis, writers, and zealots of every stamp. Singer's ironic subtlety and wit are at their sharpest in this novel. It turns out that the seemingly innocent David is a skillful avoider:

> The truth is [he confesses], I more or less wanted every one of the women I had met, but I felt no compulsion to act. I waited, ready to accept whatever fate sent me. I knew that no matter what I said to Minna, it would be true only while I was speaking.

[2] THE CERTIFICATE, by *Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Trans. from the Yiddish by *Leonard Wolf*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.00.

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By the end it becomes clear that David has used others quite as much as they have used him, and the justice meted out to him is poetic. The novel may seem flippant at times, but it has wonderful ingenuity and depth. Well before the end you appreciate why Singer won the Nobel Prize in 1978.

Imre Kertész takes an altogether different approach to suffering.[3] A Hungarian Jew, Kertész spent more than a year imprisoned at Buchenwald and Auschwitz when he was fifteen, and survived luckily. His autobiographical novel of the ordeal, *Sorstalanság* ("Without a destiny"), was published in 1975 but not translated into English until now. The reason for that delay may be in part that Kertész refused to use any of the standard formulas of outrage and horror to evoke the Holocaust. Instead everything is seen through the naïve understanding of György, his fifteen-year-old self. He does not often find his captors loathsome; sometimes they are cruel, but sometimes they are just authoritative, or handsome, or inexplicably fair-minded. When hospitalized with gruesome infections, György struggles to comprehend why the doctors express such personal concern for him. He is frightened for his life on occasion, but more often simply worn down by thirst, or hunger, or boredom. He learns that "you could be bored even in Auschwitz." He knows of the relentless cremation going on nearby, sees the chimneys near and far, smells the stench, but he's too honest to pretend it affects him profoundly: "I can say that, aside from a certain respect and of course, the smell, with which we were struck as if we were in a thick stew or swamp, I felt nothing."

The novel does not always succeed in making György's affectlessness or moral neutrality interesting. His grammatical lapses and opaque emotions sometimes seem merely to be the fault of a very awkward translation. The extreme detatchment of author from narrator sometimes leaves us adrift, unable to assess György's experience. Yet the novel is undeniably powerful, and its authenticity is even helped by these limitations. At the end György returns to Budapest and discovers that his experience does not fit what others have imagined: "the hell of the camps," the "horror," "the terrors." He determines to remain loyal to what he himself knew and felt, but he finds it incommunicable. People grow angry and confused; they want him to be a representative, a symbolic victim, a witness for the Jews; simultaneously they tell him to forget the past, start a new life. He refuses to do either, fortunately. Near the end there is an extraordinary moment in the streets of Budapest at twilight when he suddenly remembers "my favorite hour in the camp, and a sharp, painful, futile desire grasped my heart: homesickness." Even to *have* "a favorite hour" in Auschwitz is a penetrating recognition, quite apart from that final shocking discovery.

[3] FATELESS, by *Imre Kertész*. Trans. from the Hungarian by *Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson*. Northwestern University Press. $13.95p.

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Ian McEwan's previous fiction has been marred by its blatant desire to shock, dwelling sometimes with a perverse relish on scenes of sexual violence. *The Innocent* (1990), soon to be released as a motion picture starring Anthony Hopkins, contains an 80-page scene of murder and dismemberment that is more than most readers can bear—or see any good reason to. It has often been a puzzle to decide whether some of McEwan's subjects—bestiality, sado-masochism, pornography, penisectomy, matricide—have been chosen out of some private, peculiarly English sexual disturbance or simply out of a desire to affront and scandalize. Yet he has been from the start a hypnotically compelling storyteller, a shrewd critic of British repressiveness, and an unusually sensitive observer of children's suffering. By all these measures his fifth novel is his best.[4]

Its narrator is a thirty-three-year-old husband and father who is compulsively curious about his wife's parents, his own having been killed when he was eight. Jeremy tells us in a brief preface about growing up in his promiscuous older sister's house. When she and her punk husband have raging quarrels, Jeremy and his three-year-old niece Sally run for cover. He would like to protect the child, but a part of him also wants to escape and regress to her level of innocence. He also escapes by frequenting the homes of his teenage friends, "adopting" their parents. In these surrogate families he is befriended by educated and well-traveled adults, people who are "interesting" and generous and treat him as grown-up. So it is none too surprising that fifteen years later Jeremy "adopts" his wife's parents, June and Bernard. Jeremy finds them both enormously attractive, and he's driven to investigate them. What he wants to understand above all is why they separated decades ago, unable to bridge their differences in spite of a passionate love. June has spent most of her life alone in a remote farm in Provence, while Bernard has been a prominent public figure in London, a journalist and television personality. The crucial episode turns out to have been June's terrible encounter with a pair of vicious black dogs while she and Bernard were on a walking trip in France in 1946. Bernard failed to comprehend it, but June was overwhelmed, and so too by proxy is Jeremy.

Black Dogs is a meticulously compact, intelligent novel, and it tells a riveting story. McEwan keeps most of the violence latent and the sexual tension understated, with the result that both have a quiet but omnipresent ferocity. One of the most memorable moments of the book is an apparent digression in which Jeremy, retracing June and Bernard's 1946 journey in Provence, dines at a nearly deserted country inn. There he witnesses a scene of unnerving cruelty—an unhappy child is slapped by his mother ("She was plump and pink, with a pleasant round face and red patches on her cheeks like a

[4] BLACK DOGS, by *Ian McEwan*. Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. $19.50.

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doll's"), and later brutally knocked down by his father but yanked back into his chair by his mother, whose threatening finger stifles his tears. The father has "a caduceus tattooed on each of his fat forearms" but Jeremy does not realize what message from the gods is being sent. When the child is struck again, Jeremy loses control. Soon he is outside, bashing in the man's face, pounding his throat and gut, breaking his own knuckle:

> I drew back my foot, and I think I might have kicked and stomped him to death if I had not heard a voice and turned to see a thin figure [a Parisian woman who was also shocked in the dining room] in the lighted doorway across the road.
>
> The voice was calm. "*Monsieur. Je vous prie. Ça suffit.*"
>
> Immediately I knew that the elation driving me had nothing to do with revenge and justice. Horrified with myself, I stepped back.

The scene becomes a kind of permutation of Jeremy's childhood, and of Sally's, of June's encounter with the black dogs no less than Europe's encounter with Nazism, Stalinism, and the Cold War—which has supposedly just ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. I can only hint at how skillfully McEwan ties together these recognitions of personal, marital, and political culpability. At the end Jeremy must recognize himself as a perpetrator of evil, not merely its observer or victim. As his closing words attest—"crossing the shadow line," "going deeper, where the sun never reaches"—McEwan has a Racinian, or even an Euripidean, sense of the dark gods that impel us. Never before has he shaped and defined that vision so well.

There is no dearth of political novels written in Spanish these days, but maybe a dearth of inspiration. Abel Posse has issued a surreal erotic extravaganza, *Daimon*, about the mad Lope de Aguirre, which fails to improve on Werner Herzog's film of the same subject; Camilo José Cela has been equally grotesque and shallow in *Mazurka for Two Dead Men*, which deals with murder and vengeance in Galicia. But I can at least recommend the translation of José Donoso's amusing fifth novel, *El jardín de al lado*, first published in Barcelona in 1981.[5] A Chilean who spent many years in exile in the United States and Spain before returning to Santiago where he now resides, Donoso acquired what I would call a European sensibility. His novelist-narrator Julio, however, is simply a rather endearing buffoon. Poor Julio is beset by writer's block, a depressed wife, a fugitive teenage son, a bitchy agent who loathes him, and a dying mother back home in Chile. When a wealthy friend offers his elegant apartment in Madrid for the summer, Julio and Gloria accept in hopes of escaping their problems.

[5] THE GARDEN NEXT DOOR, by *José Donoso*. Trans. from the Spanish by *Hardie St. Martin*. Grove Press. $18.95.

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Instead it only brings them to a head, not least because the garden next door provides Julio with voyeuristic temptations he cannot refuse. Everything Julio sees, or imagines he sees, leaves him unhappier than he was before: scenes of an idyllic marriage, of aristocratic ease, of youthful beauty and erotic fulfillment. As his self-doubt deepens, what hope is there for his second novel? Julio consoles himself by saying, "The Boom is over." He means the great productive years of Latin American fiction—of García Márquez, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes—a boom of which poor Julio was never a part. But Donoso was, and that gives his novel an additional layer of self-mockery. In a witty final twist it turns out that the words we have been reading were written by Gloria, not Julio: she has imagined him better than he could himself. And made possible a warmer conclusion, a celebration of middle-aged love despite its crow's-feet and cellulite.

If you are a successful African-American writer and female, your every gesture has political impact. Note the high visibility of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor, and Paule Marshall. But Rita Dove has so far managed to resist the pressures—and temptations. Her austere, elliptical poems insist on the oddity and individuality of people, like her grandparents in the poem sequence *Thomas and Beulah*, or the maverick astronomer-patriot in "Banneker," or herself. Dove's first novel struggles to do the same.[6] In fact it is *about* the difficulty of resisting politicized stereotypes. Virginia King has become an actress, cellist, puppeteer, and teacher. She returns to Akron, Ohio, her birthplace (and Dove's) to direct a puppet-theater project in an elementary school. But what she is and what she is supposed to be are at odds. She grew up in Arizona, not a black community of the industrial Midwest; the Hopi Indians were more significant to her than her own race; she went to college and excelled; her artistic talents have given her unusual career choices. Kabuki Theater and Bach Cello Suites interest her; she isn't at home in blue-collar Akron. But events force her backward and downward, and threaten to take away her freedom to define herself.

Dove's subject is wonderful, her execution is not. Virginia, despite her unusual gifts, sounds conventional. When she dresses for a date or describes her teaching or an awkward moment with a parent, her language is pure ladies' magazine. When she learns her college lover is gay, the clichés abound. When she swoons with a new lover, it's embarrassing. Dove's poetry makes brilliant use of fragmented moments, jump cuts, subtle juxtapositions (see her great political poem, "Parsley"). Here however the attempt is flattened out by excessive "telling." Dolls, masks, puppets, theater, and music appear throughout, but not to any great cumulative effect. The best characterizations

[6] THROUGH THE IVORY GATE, by *Rita Dove*. Pantheon. $21.00.

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are of Virginia's grandmother and her aunt, elderly isolated women seen sharply for themselves. Virginia, by contrast, remains nebulous. Her language rarely has the intensity and individuality that we have come to expect of Rita Dove.

Wendell Berry's individuality has never been in question. He is frankly driven by his own politics—a view of human life as part of a vital ecological balance involving animals, agriculture, families, and communities in a web of vital responsibilities. His stories are simply written, with plain-spoken eloquence, everything mortised and tenoned and hand-made like good country furniture.[7] A soldier comes home to the fields. A community closes ranks after a murder. A woman who falls sick is looked after. An old man is "kidnapped" from the hospital and allowed to die in his own way. Neighbors check up on two old men isolated by a flood. Each story demonstrates how goodness and responsibility may thrive, how naturally we may interdepend—if only we lived as these honest folk do in rural Kentucky.

These are reassuring stories, tinged by a mild didacticism. But that is not their only problem. Berry seems unwilling to admit any substantial evil, any strong opponent, into his agrarian realm. All the enemies here—the dehumanizing technology of a hospital, the indifference of a bank mortgage system, the death skills taught by the military—are kept impersonal and offstage. The consequence is a fundamental sentimentality. The only threat in "Fidelity," the title story, which celebrates the way a community conceals from the eyes of the law the death and burial of one of its own, comes from a city-bred detective whose ineptitude is signaled by his being twice divorced. In fact "Fidelity" is the only story that has a villain. Consider for contrast how Jane Smiley in novels like *Good Will* and *A Thousand Acres* tests the ideal of a pastoral simplicity or the notion that integrity comes naturally for those close to the soil. Berry's fiction is unwilling to make those tests, and the result is a futile nostalgia. You must read his personal essays and books, like *The Unsettling of America*, to see his real moral fervor, his ability to confront genuine enemies, in action.

The longest, richest, most difficult fiction I've found to review turns out to be triumphantly indifferent to politics, Maureen Howard's sixth novel.[8] It begins in the mid-1940s with the middle-class Irish-Catholic family of Billy Bray, a detective in Bridgeport, Connecticut. But soon the story veers off to New York and then Hollywood, tracing the acting career of James Bray, the eldest child. It digs into the youth of Morty Ziff, James's tawdry producer, into Glenda, his brassy agent ("Love ya, babe") who hides her sophistication, into the rodeo career of James's second wife Lilah, into the black depressions of their gifted daughter Jen. James turns out to be a second-rate Robert Mitchum, who was in fact born in Bridgeport and whose 1947 film *Out of the Past*

[7] FIDELITY: Five Stories, by *Wendell Berry*. Pantheon. $20.00.
[8] NATURAL HISTORY, by *Maureen Howard*. Norton. $22.95.

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was set in a mythical Bridgeport (no bridge, no port). James meets Lilah on a movie set near a gas station, exactly where the Mitchum *film noir* begins.

By such circuitous meanders and overlappings, Howard brings the story back to her own city. James decides to return home and shoot a film about the murder his father was investigating when the novel began. Meanwhile James's unhappy sister Catherine has followed a different path, from a time of promiscuity in New York to a suicide attempt, then to an asylum, and finally back home to a life of abstinence and withdrawal. But this section of the novel, titled "Lives of the Saints," is just as much about Catherine's only friend, Mary Rose Boyle, a former nun from Pittsburgh now immersed in social work, and about Peaches, the little black girl Mary Rose would like to adopt. In fact, Howard is splendidly disloyal to the Brays, ready to divagate endlessly. For her real subject is Bridgeport itself, not just its people but its whole "natural history," including the forces that produced its present economic and social decay. Howard lets the reader linger on such representative figures as Ladislaw Litwak, the thick-headed Pole who wants to kill Billy Bray back in 1946, and Jerry De Martino, former director of the high school marching band, born in Palermo but destined to be Bridgeport's Robert Preston, "The Music Man."

Howard lingers too on the history of P. T. Barnum, Bridgeport's most celebrated citizen of the nineteenth century. In the novel's most delightful chapter, "Double Entry," the linear narrative proceeds on the right-hand page while on the left is a collage of newspaper clippings, old photos, historical tidbits, advertisements, woodcuts, jottings from the novelist's notebook, observations about the story-in-progress, poems, quotations, *pensées* about architecture, parks, and statues. Here the novelist mulls over Barnum's career and influence, his exploitation of Tom Thumb, his bombast and cheap theatrics, his anticipation of the worst qualities of our own era—its cynicism and hypocrisy. But Barnum is only part of it. "Double Entry" displays Maureen Howard's art at its most inventive and expansive. I would say it resembles the rich documentary impulse of Dos Passos in the *U. S. A.* trilogy, except that Howard is much more personal and disorganized. As Anne Tyler wrote ten years ago about another Howard novel, "It's not really disorganization at all . . . it's a distinctive view of the world . . . a conviction that life is not so much a single straight line as a kind of mosaic, unreadable to ordinary humans but endlessly fascinating nevertheless." That seems uncannily true of *Natural History*. It has its longueurs and occasional disappointments, but its language is full of pithy surprises, oddly original turns, colloquial riches. Its characters are alive. I had to read it slowly, one dense page at a time. It's a big novel, with something like a truly grasping imagination. By the end we have seen Bridgeport, and it is us.

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TESS LEWIS

Defending Children Against Fairy Tales

LONG AGO, FAIRY AND FOLK TALES, replete with violence and bawdy humor, were told mostly around peasant hearths or during long, monotonous tasks in the kitchen and barn. It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the French collector of tales, Charles Perrault, and the German Grimm brothers brought these stories into the parlor that they lost some of their violence and much of their explicit humor. Before Perrault turned "Little Red Riding Hood" into a moralizing tale about the dangers of talking to strangers, for example, a widespread version of the story recounted in great detail the heroine's seductive striptease for the wolf and her escape by asking permission to go outside and relieve herself. Although it took the English several more decades than their Continental neighbors to adopt fairy tales for genteel purposes, they did so with astonishing enthusiasm and inventiveness.

Victorian writers are primarily responsible for bringing fairy tales into the nursery. Driven by their overriding concern for productive activity and proper behavior, Victorians found fairy tales to be ideal instruments of education and socialization and perfected the art of didactic fiction. The titles alone of many Victorian children's books—*Dangerous Sports, a Tale Addressed to Children Warning them against Wanton, Careless, or Mischievous Exposure to Situations from which Alarming Injuries so often Proceed* or *Adventures of a Whipping-Top. Illustrated with Stories of Many Bad Boys, who themselves deserve whipping, and of some Good Boys, who deserve Plum-Cakes*—are enough to inspire fear. Fairy tales and children's fiction did not emerge from the stifling hold of didacticism until the revolutionary amoralism of Lewis Carroll's Alice books and his stories of Sylvie and Bruno.

In *Off with Their Heads!: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*, Maria Tatar, a professor of German at Harvard University, traces the history of fairy tales and examines the ways in which they were intended to socialize young, unformed listeners.[1] Against this backdrop, she sets her argument that the canon of tales we offer our children is in dire need of a thorough reevaluation. Our fairy tale

[1] OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood, by *Maria Tatar*. Princeton University Press. $24.95.

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canon was formed for the most part by Perrault and the Grimms and reinforced by Walt Disney. Despite superficial rewriting, these versions date from very different social and historical contexts and, Tatar suggests, they may well be doing more harm than good to our children's psyches. Because "fairy tales do not merely encode social arrangements from the past, but also participate in their creation for the future," the misogyny, violence, and anti-Semitism in many of the tales can, despite our best intentions, perpetuate itself in the subconscious of younger generations.

"No fairy tale text is sacred," Tatar announces, reminding us that the printed text of a tale is only a "variation on a theme" and often heavily edited. Fairy tales have been continuously rewritten to suit the needs of adults in particular social and historical contexts. Even contemporary children's literature, according to Tatar, although written under the guise of taking the child's side, actually helps indoctrinate them in "proper" behavior. In her eyes, Sendak's nocturnal heroes Max (in *Where the Wild Things Are*) and Mickey (of *Mickey in the Night Kitchen*) are not the mischievous, free spirited role models they seem. Instead, by discharging their disobedient impulses and anger against their mothers in midnight fantasies, Max and Mickey are "less likely to be defiant" during the day. As long as children's literature is written by adults, this sort of subliminal control is inevitable. However, if writers are careful and alert, Tatar asserts, they can rewrite canonical tales and create new ones that "interrogate and take the measure" of their attempts to socialize coercively. Only then can stories provide children with true heroes and heroines, and empower as well as entertain them.

Tatar's call for revising children's literature beneficially requires overthrowing the Freudian legacy embodied in our commonly told fairy tales. She finds "Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus story . . . so firmly inscribed on our consciousness as a model of male development that its plot begins to take on the role of a self-fulfilling prophecy." Today's most popular fairy tales subtly reinforce erroneous or limited views of women inherent in the Freudian outlook: Snow White and Cinderella win their princes through a combination of good looks, extraordinary housekeeping, and modesty; the punishment for Bluebeard's wife's curiosity—a symbolic sexual transgression—is death. Until we challenge these prototypes we are at worst offering harmful images to children in their formative years, or at best leaving young girls adrift, without strong role models.

Tatar's *bête noire* in *Off with Their Heads!* is Bruno Bettelheim. Indeed, she sees his interpretation of fairy tales as "deeply symptomatic of our own culture's thinking about children," and instrumental in perpetuating our uncritical acceptance of the inappropriate subliminal messages in traditional tales. In his 1976 classic study, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bettelheim shows how fairy tales fulfill children's deepest inner needs and help

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them cope with the psychological difficulties of growing up by dramatizing unconscious conflicts in imaginative form. Tatar does formulate several important and insightful objections to Bettelheim's analyses. She points out how Bettelheim's Freudian blinders lead him instinctively to ascribe guilt to child characters even when the adults' behavior is obviously egregious. In Bettelheim's hands, Hansel and Gretel are abandoned because of their uncontrollable oral greed, not out of parental negligence. Bettelheim is also unwilling to recognize parental incestuous drives. Instead, the drives he discusses are strictly within the typical Oedipal construct of a child's excessive attachment to the parent of the opposite sex. Nonetheless, Bettelheim explicitly states that his interpretation is one of many possible interpretations. And, however biased his readings, he can hardly be held primarily responsible for the perpetuation of the Freudian cultural legacy in children's literature.

Tatar's eagerness to demonize Bettelheim seriously mars her otherwise convincing, if at times ponderous, book. She not only distorts Bettelheim's study of fairy tales as a therapeutic tool, but indulges in amateur psychologizing, claiming to find in the book's conclusion "a great deal about Bettelheim's own real-life fantasies" and a motivation for his suicide fourteen years after he had written it. Tatar implicitly justifies jettisoning Bettelheim's Freudian interpretation by evoking charges of abuse made against Bettelheim after his death in 1990. Though limiting mention of these charges to a footnote, she provides them with no context. These accusations are certainly serious. Yet they have not been fully substantiated and are surrounded with controversy. It is significant, for example, that a reporter at a major national magazine admitted to one of Bettelheim's colleagues that these charges were not brought against him until after his death because estates cannot sue for libel.

There are several subtle but important distortions in Tatar's rejection of *The Uses of Enchantment*. Tatar claims that Bettelheim warns against discussing fairy tales with children, thus leaving them at the mercy of biased, dangerous texts, unable to sort out threatening material. But in fact Bettelheim advises against adults giving a child their particular interpretation of the child's psychological understanding of a story. "It is always intrusive to interpret a person's unconscious thoughts," he writes. Far more than a question of semantics, this difference is indicative of Tatar's willful misreading of Bettelheim to suit the needs of her argument.

Further misreading results from Tatar's omission of the first half of *The Uses of Enchantment*, in which Bettelheim examines the relevance of fairy tales to general, and not strictly Oedipal, unconscious conflicts in both children and adults. Contrary to Tatar's reasoning that "if we read myths and fairy tales through the lens of the oedipal drama, we will necessarily see the child as the sole target of therapeutic intervention," Bettelheim repeatedly stresses that adults can also benefit

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from reading fairy tales. It is often very difficult for adults to acknowledge consciously their unconscious anxieties, such as a fear of abandonment. Whereas children lack the intellectual capacity for the complex abstract thought necessary to understand their inner anxieties, adults build up formidable psychological defenses. Accordingly, a reader of any age can unconsciously identify with Hansel and Gretel, left in the wood to fend for themselves, as an embodiment of a fear of abandonment and thus defuse this fear without becoming consciously aware of it.

The vehemence of Tatar's attack on Bettelheim is especially unfortunate because it is unnecessary to the exposition of her own argument. There is no doubt that her evaluation of many fairy tales in the Grimm and Perrault collections as excessively violent, male chauvinist, and terrifying for children is correct. It is also clear that many tales with strong heroines have been sorely neglected. To be sure, there is much of interest in *Off with Their Heads!* that does not need to be supported with an *ad hominem* attack.

Tatar's chapter on the use of bedtime stories, particularly in the nineteenth century, to develop "a pedagogy of fear," with which parents could control young children by instilling them with terror at the thought of disobedience or stubbornness is chilling. In another fascinating chapter Tatar looks at the symbolic links between cannibalism, fantasies of oral greed, and incest. Finally, Tatar's analysis of how stories in which maternal elements were demonized became increasingly popular while stories of paternal incestual desire fell into neglect does far more to open the reader's eyes to the baleful subtext in many fairy tales than her summoning of Stanley Fish's interpretive communities or Michel Foucault's theories of disciplinary systems. The wicked stepmothers in "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," and "The Juniper Tree," as well as the witch in "Rapunzel" are familiar figures while the king in Perrault's "Donkey-skin," who tries to force his daughter to marry him, is known to few who are not avid fairy tale readers.

Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher, professors of English at the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University respectively, have compiled an anthology that is guided by many of the principles presented in *Off with Their Heads!*. In *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*, the editors have gathered stories in which women writers have sought to refashion or subvert the traditional genre to suit their own needs and those of nineteenth-century children.[2]

In Victorian England, women were equated, socially, legally, and intellectually with children. It is not surprising then, that many

[2] FORBIDDEN JOURNEYS: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers, ed. by *Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepflmacher*. University of Chicago Press. $27.50.

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women turned to children's literature as an imaginative release for their anger and frustration, as well as their utopian ideals. Although the most famous works of Victorian children's literature were written by men—Lewis Carroll's Alice books, George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*, and James Barrie's *Peter Pan*—the vast majority was written by, and subconsciously for, women.

Though Auerbach and Knoepflmacher have selected some captivating fiction, they have allowed their socio-political agenda to skew their readings of the novella and the ten stories they selected, leaving a gap between the editors' introductory material and the stories themselves. Several of the stories they would have us believe represent major imaginative subversions of Victorian mores are actually quite conventional in plot and social attitudes. Many of the tales are moralistic or reward the female self-deprecation against which the editors claim these writers were reacting.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie posits upper-middle-class girls as the heroines of her reworkings of "Beauty and the Beast" and "Sleeping Beauty." While Ritchie does level some oblique social criticism in both these tales, her heroines do exactly what is expected of them and their subservience and sense of duty is rewarded with marriage. (The beast in question is a gruff and shaggy, but extremely sensitive gentleman.) Although the editors praise Christina Rossetti's courage in portraying childhood unsanitized of violence, disappointment, and misery, in her "antifantasies" "Speaking Likenesses," the view Rossetti offers is nonetheless very constricted. A similar constraint, though somewhat relieved by humorous asides, underlies Juliana Horatia Ewing's "Amelia and the Dwarfs." An inconsiderate, unruly, obnoxious child, Amelia is kidnapped by dwarves who put her to work cooking, repairing her torn dresses, and gathering up all the loose threads of the conversations she interrupted. Amelia escapes only after she has learned her lesson in docility and reserve.

Edith Nesbit's two stories are the most colorful and openly critical in this collection. Nesbit herself was a daring woman. Flaunting social convention she adopted a Bohemian lifestyle, bobbed her hair, and smoked in public. She was also a founding member of the socialist Fabian Society, and wrote many of the group's manifestos. Nesbit's socialist bent is most evident in "Fortunatus Rex & Co.," in which King Fortunatus starts a speculative building company in order to distract himself from grief, as his daughter has been kidnapped from the "Select Boarding Establishment for the Daughters of Respectable Monarchs" despite the school's "very best references." While King Fortunatus makes a fortune out of his ugly yellow brick housing developments, seven princes set out to rescue the seven princesses kidnapped from the boarding school. The princes are at first stymied when they find the magician who had spirited the princesses away trapped inside a globe in one of the classrooms. Trained neither as explorers nor engineers, the princes are reluctant to comply with the

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magician's requests for them to "open up Africa," "cut through the Isthmus of Panama," or "cut up China." However, for the sake of the princesses, they do eventually cut up Africa, releasing the magician. In "Melisande, or Long and Short Division," a delightful fairy tale about a princess whose hair grows so quickly it takes over the palace, Nesbit satirizes the import/export trade and mathematical rationality.

The longest selection in *Forbidden Journeys* is Jean Ingelow's novella "Mopsa the Fairy," a saccharine story of a little boy's travels in Fairyland. Even though the countries in Fairyland are ruled by queens, this is hardly a refashioning or subversion of the genre. More stories by Edith Nesbit and Juliana Ewing, or even the more conventional Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of *The Secret Garden*, would have better supported the editors' agenda for this anthology.

Both *Forbidden Journeys* and *Off with Their Heads!* amply show how malleable and ambiguous, if not treacherous, a medium fairy tales can be. But more importantly, these books stress how fairy tales can inspire, comfort, and guide readers of all ages. The enchantment of fairy tales plays an essential role in the foundation of a child's moral imagination. It is no less essential for adults to be aware of where their own moral imagination is grounded and to nourish it by turning again and again to literature of enchantment.

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HAROLD FROMM

Aesthetic Subversions

ALTHOUGH MARK EDMUNDSON, editor of *Wild Orchids and Trotsky: Messages from American Universities*,[1] claims that "all the commotion [about political correctness] is coming from a few splinter groups of academic malcontents," the preface he writes to this collection of essays by diverse academic hands fails to characterize with real accuracy what actually follows. Not only is it untrue that all criticisms of political correctness emanate from neoconservatives or fringe reactionary academics, but some of Edmundson's own contributors—Edward Said, Frank Lentricchia, Harold Bloom, William Kerrigan, and in some respects, Richard Rorty and Richard Poirier—give the lie to this thesis right under his very nose. A professor of English at the University of Virginia, Edmundson is capable of judicious literary analysis (witness his recent essay on Wordsworth and Coleridge in *South Atlantic Quarterly*), but in his capacity as editor he is not averse to using the same techniques of journalistic hype that he himself otherwise disparages. When he notes that "naturally, one risks becoming a mere mirror image of the kind of authority one most detests," he comes closer to home than he seems to realize, for his summary dismissal of Roger Kimball, David Lehman, and Dinesh D'Souza as "opportunists" could just as easily be directed at his own contributors Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Houston Baker, Jr. (and J. Hillis Miller has never been known to miss a beat). The waters of orthodoxy and opportunism are muddy, nor does this book really clear them up. Yet while these essays, distinguished for the most part by their autobiographical perspective, are uneven in quality, the book is worth its price for the Rorty and Lentricchia pieces alone—and the interview with Harold Bloom is hilarious.

For starters, juicing some of this book's lemons would help to clarify the distinction between cultishness and creative thinking, especially since some of these lemons grow on the very same tree where the politically correct find Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, et al., though they may taste different to leftist and rightist taste buds. The sourest is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Queer and Now," a rambling, episodic, rough draft of gripes about homophobia trying to sound like a carefully conceived social science. It would be foolish to deny that

[1] WILD ORCHIDS AND TROTSKY: Messages from American Universities, ed. by *Mark Edmundson*. Penguin Books. $12.00p.

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Sedgwick has been a pioneer in gay studies or that her writing is full of exploding light bulbs (is she, after all, the Camille Paglia of the left?), but it would be just as foolish to pretend that she is not one of the most inept academic writers currently dominating the PC scene. Sloppy, prolix, boring, sprinkled with solecisms, dependent upon wild hyperbole and hasty universals culled from a pretty small universe, Sedgwick's "prose" is desperately far from inspiring the confidence of philosophic authority: "Many or all of us, even in our quite various identities *as* women, have been intimately formed by, among other things, the availability for our own identifications of men and of male 'perversion,' courage, care, loss, struggle, and creativity. . . . It wouldn't have required quite so overdetermined a trajectory, though, for almost any forty-year-old facing a protracted, life-threatening illness in 1991 to realize that the people with whom she had perhaps most in common, and from whom she might well have most to learn, are people living with AIDS, AIDS activists, and others whose lives had been profoundly reorganized by AIDS in the course of the 1980's." That this essay's yards of cotton-wool talkativeness posing as writing are not atypical can be verified from almost any page of Sedgwick's recent *Epistemology of the Closet*: "It has felt throughout this work as though the density of their social meaning lends any speech act concerning these issues—and outlines of that 'concern,' it turns out, are broad indeed—the exaggerated propulsiveness of wearing flippers in a swimming pool: the force of various rhetorical effects has seemed uniquely difficult to calibrate." How much can one trust the thinking of someone as coarsely untuned as this? Many years of study and practice will be required to train Sedgwick up to an ear of tin. (But among the politically correct, artistry is considered fascist.)

Houston Baker, Jr.'s essay on why rap music and poetry are more worthwhile for "postmodern" youth than Western Civ's white male classics itself sounds pretty rappy at times, but this is hardly a surprise from someone as chameleon-like as Baker. (Only the other day he sounded like Derrida and Foucault.) "In a too shorthanded manner, then, one might say that Johnny and Johnetta can't read 'the classics' because neither the classics nor their advocates have realigned themselves and their project to read Johnny or Johnetta—or to listen to them, or to comprehend their postmodern connectedness to a reformed future." When Baker asks his graduate seminar what they regarded as "poetry for the next society," they replied, MTV and Rap. How so, you want to ask? "Faced with the prospect of . . . an enslaving and myopic 'cultural literacy' [a reference to E.D. Hirsch], Johnny and his fellows have bolted from the schools and given birth to energetic expressive forms such as postmodern hip-hop, interventionist film culture, and radical scholarship into gender, class, and race determinants of power and knowledge in the world we inhabit." If you want to know the latest academic clichés, there's no source more depend-

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able than Baker, who eats them up as his daily bread and then throws them up as brilliant insights.

Michael Bérubé, described by Edmundson as a "leading young critic," is a whizz-bang manic trendie, almost as soft on clichés as Baker but even more pious: "I'm always amused at the claim that feminism is bad for the family; I find it hard to believe my family would be better off if I left all the material child care to Janet, contenting myself with the dispensation of money, justice, and sound moral observations." There's not much one can say to something like this except "Moralist, know thyself!" At least Bérubé still has time to grow up.

What rescues the reader of this book from the queasiness of too much high-fat virtuousness are the needlings of political correctness by Harold Bloom and William Kerrigan and the virtuosity of Richard Rorty and Frank Lentricchia. Defending Shakespeare as a poetic genius (which requires a lot of chutzpah these days), Bloom showers scorn on "The School of Resentment," those "gender and power freaks" who attack the university that nourishes them and the literature that sustains them, and who are little more than "a pride of displaced social workers, a rabblement of lemmings, all rushing down to the sea carrying their subject down to destruction with them." "All of the traits of the Stalinist in the 1930s and 1940s are being repeated in this whole resentment in the universities in the 1990s. The intolerance, the self-congratulation, smugness, sanctimoniousness, the retreat from imaginative values, the flight from the aesthetic." It is this sort of recoil at insensitivity to the aesthetic that dominates the major contributions to *Wild Orchids* even if the book advertises itself as a defense of political correctness against rightist onslaughts. (Yes, Nancy K. Miller, Judith Frank, and Susan Fraiman do deliver a feminist message, but theirs are not the book's most distinctive accomplishments.)

William Kerrigan tries to rescue literature from the easy victories of over-theorizing, from the Derridean prose style "so dedicated to self-awareness that reading it was like watching someone study his facial tics in a mirror." "What used to be called 'aesthetic experience' or 'imaginative experience' was now declared to be an ideological delusion," a smokescreen concealing the fact that everything is political. But for Kerrigan this "everything is political" truism is just a weapon of academic politics, "unwilling to let the attention of others wander beyond race, gender, and class." Bringing to mind Gerald Graff's recent piece on hating literature at an early age and being rescued by theory, Kerrigan remarks, "I should have seen from the beginning that many of the theorists hated literature."

The essays by Richard Rorty and Frank Lentricchia stand out for their general creativity—their distinctiveness of thought, mastery of tone, intellectual playfulness and wit, and all-around prose skill. Reading their work we feel we are making contact with the vital

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springs, rather than the rivulets and capillaries that run through every graduate student's backyard. Despite their influential presence in the humanities, however, they don't seem to have many disciples or epigones because their distinctive qualities don't lend themselves to easy imitation.

"If there is anything to the idea that the best intellectual position is one equidistant from the right and from the left, I am doing very nicely," begins Rorty. The right sees him as a relativistic irrationalist who is corrupting the young, and the left sees him as an elitist intellectual snob snared by capitalism. The scandal for the left is that Rorty finds America to be "an example of the best kind of society so far invented," a position "about as politically incorrect as you can get." For the right, it's not enough "just to *prefer* democratic societies"—one has to see them as God's preference too.

Rorty provides us with an amusing little autobiographical sketch explaining how he got to be the person he is now. Its tongue-in-cheek mockeries are just the sort of thing that drive some people, on both sides, crazy. Rorty's parents were die-hard Trotskyites whose sacred texts stood in the place of the gospels, but Rorty had *aesthetic* interests of his own.

> At fifteen I escaped from the bullies who regularly beat me up on the playground of my high school (bullies who, I assumed, would somehow wither away once capitalism had been overcome) by going off to the so-called "Hutchins College" of the University of Chicago. (This was the institution immortalized by A. J. Leibling as "the biggest collection of juvenile neurotics since the Children's Crusade.") Insofar as I had any project in mind, it was to reconcile Trotsky with the orchids [that Rorty collected as a passionate hobby].

After years of attempting such a reconciliation, Rorty has come to the conclusion that without shared foundations—epistemological, moral, aesthetic—the single-minded quest for purity of heart leads only to disasters like totalitarianism and mass extermination. So he rejects substantives that begin with capital letters, "the Movement, Reason, the Good, the Holy," because attempts to force agreement about essences of this sort inevitably go awry. "There is nothing sacred about universality that makes the shared automatically better than the unshared." As a Deweyan pragmatist he regards the eternal verities as socially constructed and constantly changing, the "rational and objective" as "'just' a result of how you were brought up." Because his preoccupation with not causing pain to others allies him in large measure with certain aspects of political correctness and the social diversity movement, while his allegiance to bourgeois democratic capitalism and bourgeois artworks alienates him from many of this movement's big shots, he comes off to some as a quixotic figure. Or as

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he devastatingly puts it, "Postmodernists who consider themselves post-Marxists still want to preserve the sort of purity of heart that Lenin feared he might lose if he listened to too much Beethoven."

Rorty's urbane wit and his satisfaction with bourgeois life (but he doesn't think America is perfect) are out of tune with the inverted snobbery of today's academic slumming. Frank Lentricchia may appear somewhat more acceptable, at first glance, because of his Marxist sympathies and his tough-guy persona (which was given a spin by the photo on the back cover of *Criticism and Social Change*), but the impression is probably deceptive. In "My Kinsman, T.S. Eliot," an essay, as I see it, built upon artful use of heteroglossia (Bakhtin's term for the many-voicedness of the novel as a literary form) to underscore his theme of the mystery and complexity of one's identity (sexuality and all), Lentricchia spoofs his own virility as an "Italian American" brought up in a tough neighborhood where he feared to be seen by his friends reading Shelley or carrying an armload of books from the library. "Most of my favorite writers now are poets. The ones who aren't love words and rhythms the way the best poets love words, rhythms, and the sounds of different voices. My favorite writers are estheticians of the peculiar. . . . I'm not depressed about being called the 'Dirty Harry of contemporary literary theory.' Now I get to walk through the playground, carrying the poems of Shelley." And recalling his grammar school teacher Miss Beach, who refused to re-read aloud "Jack and the Beanstalk" on request, he observes, "And now I don't have to depend on Miss Beach in order to get inside the [storyteller's] magic circle. I am Miss Beach."

In a little paean to a high school teacher whose performative skills enabled macho pubescents to enjoy Shakespeare without an identity crisis, Lentricchia notes, "To speak the language as he speaks it has to be an erotic experience and just hearing him teaches us that language is a thing that can be loved, that such love (it dare not speak its name in today's academy) will be requited with the favors that quench all desire. He never says that to us directly, it was unsayable in our neighborhood, but this is what he teaches."

Lentricchia's kinship with Eliot is presaged by epigraphs from Eliot's criticism preceding each section of his many-voiced essay. And though this essay is difficult, sometimes obscure, it seems to be illustrating Eliot's idea that the self is—or can be—formed through the agencies of art, especially a public art that infuses the individual with a larger sense of social and cultural solidarity (but there's also room for the "peculiar"). Comparing his own teaching of *The Waste Land* to the accomplishments of Marie Lloyd (the music hall performer whom Eliot extolled), Lentricchia muses: "To sift [my students'] consciousness into the world through the medium of *The Waste Land*. I, the sifter. A good thing, or assault with a deadly weapon?" Lentricchia, valuing concreteness over the abstractions of theory, "elite" artworks (like Eliot's) over multicultural pieties (his wife, who is

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not Italian American, has written the best Italian American short stories he knows), is unsure of his "self" and its mission, unsure at a time when sexual and ethnic identities are required by PC etiquette to be proudly essentialized. In his coda, however, where he describes the concrete effect on the reader of the way Don DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* prizes individual particular things, he seems to value art as a concrete universal as well as a social and psychological good. Speaking to the reader about DeLillo's sensitivity to the particular, he remarks, "Unabstract representation of a desire for abstraction that subverts itself in the act of announcing its desire. You like that." The parody of theoretical language juxtaposed with "You like that" is a deft conclusion to an artful interplay of voices.

But I've probably not read this book as its gestator intended. Instead of a defense of political correctness in the academy, what I really find here is a defense of politically incorrect aesthetic values, with Baker, Bérubé, Sedgwick, and a few others, thrown in to placate the herd of independent minds that sees itself as academia's cutting edge.

My apologies to Mark Edmundson.

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MARK JARMAN

Journals of the Soul

RECENTLY A WOMAN TOLD ME that she had been accused of writing like a man because her poems slam shut at the end. One thinks of W. B. Yeats's belief that a poem was finished when it clicked shut like a box and also of Robert Frost saying, "I think a poem should have doors. I wouldn't leave them open though." Yet Emily Dickinson's poems seem like a series of doors or rooms full of doors slamming shut while others open. It is interesting to think of closure as gender specific, but only until exceptions proliferate and form new generalizations. The six poets under review here, all women, have written poems in their new books that click shut and are open-ended. Still, a developing process of thought underlies each book and makes even the most finished of its poems communicate with others around it. That thought, though it is the thought of a woman's mind in a woman's body, is distinctly spiritual in tone and inclined to transcend gender. Each of these books is, more or less, the journal of soul.

Lynn Hejinian's new book[1] is actually a journal, a series of dated entries beginning October 6, 1986 and ending January 21, 1989. On the page, each entry has a central column with arms extended to the left margin. The language is always about something, but rarely is that something revealed or, if it is, it is not developed for more than a few lines. The entry dated May 21, 1988 begins like this:

> The wonderful muffledness of the
> moment of solitude which covers
> the breasts
> They are both locks and
> lapses
> Words—
> But the moment is very
> warm—summer arrives without thinking
> although thought is intruding

The idea of intrusion turns up now and then throughout the book, but it is often unspecified. If it is thought, does it include the possibility that an entry might resolve into an individual poem? A few entries later, one dated September 11, 1988, begins

[1] THE CELL, by *Lynn Hejinian*. Sun & Moon Classics. $11.95p.

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There is pleasure in producing
percussion, measure in intrusion
I like to let there
be intrusion

It may be words themselves are the intrusion she speaks of, bringing with them evidence of thought, only to be intruded upon by other words and thoughts. I would call this associative thinking if it were more imagistic, but Hejinian's own description of noise, including music, as having "a continuous destination" is more apt. Association leads to revelation and insight and in poetry it may lead to closure. Hejinian's writing is as close to composition by field as anyone has come. A reader can enter the 217 pages of *The Cell* anywhere without feeling lost.

I am not going to pretend I like this kind of thing, because I don't. Hejinian is probably the most talented of the so-called Language Poets and escapes their ideological methods by sheer wit. The title of her book, with its suggestion of confinement, closure, contrasts with the actual structure of its poems. But her art is really quite homely, without the glamour in which other recent experimental writing has been packaged. It is more like furniture-moving, arranging things provisionally while at the same time saying, "Read this and tell me what it says." Her poems present a grid and a mind, but a very appealing and felicitous mind.

This is the way I
want to go in and
out of heaven—with depth
perception.

One can imagine Emily Dickinson recognizing this feeling. As with all such writing, I keep reading to understand until I understand that understanding may not be the reason for reading. Yet what I perceive as the soul of Hejinian's poetry is not ultimately formless, though I cannot describe it.

Denise Levertov's newest[2] forms a long sequence about growing older, with a terrific payoff. This is the best writing she has done in years. Her strengths have always been a superb ear and a gift for the free verse line. These are present from the book's beginning, in the first section entitled "Lake Mountain Moon." Here is all of "Presence."

Though the mountain's the same warm-tinted ivory
as the clouds (as if a red ground had been laid beneath
not quite translucent white) and though the clouds
disguise its shoulders, and rise tall to left and right,
and soften the pale summit with mist,

[2] EVENING TRAIN, by *Denise Levertov*. New Directions. $17.95.

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yet one perceives
the massive presence, obdurate, unconcerned
among those filmy guardians.

As she searches for meaning among her subjects, she expresses its discovery without coyness or archness. Whether she is imagining Ruskin in Yosemite or the similarity between salmon and memory, she is excellent company. Even as she dwells on her own aging, she brings to it her finest lyric gifts, as in these lines from "Broken Pact."

A face ages quicker than a mind.

And thighs, arms, breasts,
take on an air of indifference.
Heart's desire has wearied them, they chose to forget
whatever they once promised.

But mind and heart continue
their eager conversation . . .

Levertov is especially good in the book's longer poems, like "Letter to a Friend," "Link," and "Dream Instruction." In the last she addresses an "old mother sitting in bed" who becomes an image of someone who has "come to live in what happens, not in the telling." In the title poem, the poet watches an old man sleeping in her train compartment, then realizes,

I called him old, but then I remember
my own age, and acknowledge he's likely
no older than I. But in the dimension
that moves with us but itself keeps still
like the bubble in a carpenter's level,
I'm fourteen, watching the faces I saw each day
on the train going in to London,
and never spoke to; or guessing
from a row of shoes what sort of faces
I'd see if I raised my eyes.

When Levertov is writing like this, she is the equal of any poet we have today.

A weakness of the book reflects a weakness and strength of Levertov's career and that is a desire to be topical. During the Vietnam War, Levertov wrote some of the best poems against the war along with some of the worst. *Evening Train* includes poems about a gay man's estrangement from his parents, wife-beating, and the Gulf War. None of them is very good, but some include lines whose exactness and music transcend the political intention they have been invented for, like these from "In California During the Gulf War."

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Among the blight-killed eucalypts, among
trees and bushes rusted by Christmas frosts,
the yards and hillsides exhausted by five years of drought,

certain airy white blossoms punctually
reappeared . . .

You can hear the drought in those words, in the inner rhyming of "rusted," "frosts," and "exhausted," offset by the extraordinary line about blossoms and the inspired word "punctually."

When she turns from the topical, as if leaving behind a list of completed assignments, Levertov comes back to her ongoing meditation on aging. The second to last poem, "The Tide," is the kind of poem that could be written only by someone who had paid close attention to experience as she grew older. These lines provide a metaphor you could almost live by.

Clean the littered beach, clear
the lines of a forming poem,
the waters flood inward.
Dull stones again fulfill
their glowing destinies, and emptiness
is a cup, and holds
the ocean.

Tess Gallagher's new book[3] is the journal of a soul trying to deal with an irrevocable loss. It contains sixty poems and the best of them concern the death of her husband. Whenever his presence is felt, it focuses the poet, gives her the discipline of some inherent form (even if it is only the address) to keep her from her tendency to create diffuse or clotted passages of writing that seem to be no more than poeticizing. The book's first poem is one of its most successful. It is uncharacteristically brief, austere, and lucid. Here it is in full, the poem "Yes."

Now we are like that flat cone of sand
in the garden of the Silver Pavilion in Kyoto
designed to appear only in moonlight.

Do you want me to mourn?
Do you want me to wear black?
Or like moonlight on whitest sand
to use your dark, to gleam, to shimmer?

I gleam. I mourn.

[3] MOON CROSSING BRIDGE, by *Tess Gallagher*. Graywolf. $17.00; $12.00.

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She enacts a number of private rituals in the ghostly presence of her husband and some with his corpse. In "Paradise" she explains how a friend who "had been staying awake for me" leaves her alone with her husband's body. She describes speaking to him and rubbing his feet with oil. But the final stanza grows increasingly hermetic, pulling further away from the moving clarity of her moment with her dead husband. It appears to be offered as insight.

> For to confirm what is forever beyond speech
> pulls action out of us. And if it is only childlike and
> unreceived, the way a child hums to the stick
> it is using to scratch houses into the dirt, still
> it is a silky membrane and shining
> even to the closed eye.

I am with her until the final two lines. She often compares her own actions to those of a child or depicts herself as a girl. But just as often she employs pretty, ornamental, and finally obscure images like the "silky membrane" bit here.

The obscure and ornamental predominate in the book. There is so much of them that when she comes to the book's other truly fine poem, "I Stop Writing the Poem," I ask myself why she does not stop more often. "I Stop Writing the Poem,"

> to fold the clothes. No matter who lives
> or who dies, I'm still a woman.
> I'll always have plenty to do.
> I bring the arms of his shirt
> together. Nothing can stop
> our tenderness. I'll get back
> to the poem. I'll get back to being
> a woman. But for now
> there's a shirt, a giant shirt
> in my hands, and somewhere a small girl
> standing next to her mother
> watching to see how it's done.

Other themes, even techniques, even phrases from Gallagher's previous work are echoed here, like the use of the title as a first line, the function of domestic chores as a way of dealing with grief, and the persona of the girl. But on the facing page, in "Cherry Blossoms," she remembers a dog who befriended her in childhood this way:

> Miles of night and her wild vowellings under
> great moons, subsiding into a kind of atrocious
> laughter, what I think of now as faint gleams
> of demoniac nature ratifying itself.

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This language is simply overwrought. Gallagher has always been best in the short, spare, basically narrative lyric, and that is how she is best in this book of grief.

Tess Gallagher has a powerful emotion at heart and that may be what leads her to excess. Gjertrud Schnackenberg does not appear to have anything at heart but the desire to dazzle. Her new book[4] abounds with references to gold, glittering, and gilt. Though many of the references have to do with the decay of Western art, the failures to preserve myth, the expense of spirit in a waste of paint, and finally the suffering of the artist (her long last section is about Osip Mandelstam), the end result is a superficial glamour. Fool's gold.

Of course, Schnackenberg is no fool. Her previous book, *The Lamplit Answer,* showed her to be capable of wit and cunning self-analysis rendered with an elegant sense of style. It could be that confronting the shades of Dante, Piero della Francesca, and Osip Mandelstam is all too much for her, despite the voluminous notes at the end of her book that attest to her erudition. It certainly sets my teeth on edge to hear her patronize each of these great artists with direct addresses ("Dante, in paradise, as you climbed, / From the starry paths you must have seen / The mansions that stood uninhabited // In empty Florence . . ."), but there is also something puzzling about the book's entire project, especially when considering who is writing it. Most of the poems are written in slack pentameter or trimeter lines, but without any of Schnackenberg's typical use of rhyme. The only formal principle seems to be to keep sentences running as long as possible, extending them with the aid of conjunctions until it becomes not so much a relief that a sentence ends, but a surprise. Nor is there any sense that she is making her way toward enlightenment or epiphany, as she so remarkably achieved in the title poem of her previous book. The poems here aren't strings—that would be too modest a metaphor—but chains of details, as if she were following the spines of dinosaurs vertebra after vertebra into the mud. Only when she enters the third and final part of her book does she achieve something like emotive power, largely due to what we know of Mandelstam's tragedy. Yet there is something heartless in her imagining an ideal world, a utopia, for him, as in these lines:

> You will be free to wander
> In the metropolitan library,
> Free to stare,
> Without arousing suspicion,
> At the statue voted by the senate
> To honor Poetry,

[4] A GILDED LAPSE OF TIME, by *Gjertrud Schnackenberg.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $19.00.

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Once a block of undifferentiated marble
Originally destined, in the old life,
For a grandiloquent hotel lobby
In the Empire style . . .

What makes *A Gilded Lapse of Time* seem like the journal of a soul is the final and most successful poem, that identifies the speaker as part of a misanthropic tradition that includes D. H. Lawrence. Having surveyed Western history through its most powerful myth—Christianity—and its deadliest metaphor—totalitarianism—Schnackenberg ends by writing,

If I could begin again,
Time is something I would measure
In generations of roses, evolving across
Gulfs we have no records of,
Eons without witnesses,
Without surviving portraits . . .

The poem extends its conceit for seven pages in which Schnackenberg effectively does away with history, but the surfeit chokes the reader. It is a tour de force, but that is all it is.

Robert Frost maintained that poetry's height was "the philosophical attempt to say matter in terms of spirit, or spirit in terms of matter, to make final unity." Though he also added that this attempt inevitably fails or stops short, still he thought it the "greatest of all attempts to say one thing in terms of another." I believe that is what Brenda Hillman has done in her new book[5]—tried to find that mediating metaphor between body and soul that not only establishes a similitude but expresses the absolute identity of each.

Where Gjertrud Schnackenberg might seek a revelation in the Uffizi, Brenda Hillman has hers in Baskin Robbins. "Old Ice" is representative of the many commonplace situations in which Hillman engages in uncommon meditation.

You stood in the ice cream shop
and from the street, in a group
of silly glass trumpets
light came,
and broke into millions of itself, shattered
from the pressure of being mute who knows how long.

In the book's first poem, "Little Furnace," a voice tells the poet that she is not only the shape but the meaning of her life. "Old Ice" ends

[5] BRIGHT EXISTENCE, by *Brenda Hillman*. Wesleyan/University Press of New England. $22.50; $10.95.

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with a reflection on poetry's former role and a projection into the book's concerns, as stated in "Little Furnance."

> Once it seemed the function of poetry
> was to redeem our lives.
> But it was not. It was to become
> indistinguishable from them.

Brenda Hillman's imagistic gift is great, the strongest feature of her previous books, *Fortress* and *White Dress*, but like Frost she also has a gift for phrasing, for catching the tones of a speaker's thought. We can hear it in "First Thought." Describing the birth of her daughter, she writes, "The first thought / was rage."

> The moment my daughter was lifted
> from me, that sticky
> flesh screamed fury,
> for she, too, blamed the female body—
> I loved it that she screamed—
>
> and I knew I had been sent to earth to understand that pain.

Gnosticism is behind much of the book's impulse and if we recoil from that mode of thinking, which negates the equation between matter and spirit, then we ought to look more closely at what Hillman's words say, rather than what a few of her epigraphs suggest. "First Thought" ends on a note rooted in Frost's understanding of Jamesian pragmatism.

> The last pain on earth will not be the central pain,
> it will be the pain of the soul and not the body,
> the pain of the body will be long since gone,
> absorbed into the earth, which made it beautiful—
>
> don't you love the word raiment?
> Dawn comes in white raiment.
> Something like that.

It takes a peculiarly American sense of the ineffable to write a phrase like "Something like that." It was in such pronouns—*something*, *that*—that Frost and Stevens conveyed the sublimity they could not or would not otherwise name. So does Brenda Hillman, at her best.

I do have an objection to the approach of some of the poems here, because of added quirks in a style that is sufficient without them. Like Jorie Graham, Hillman has attempted to assimilate some of the mannerisms of the Language Poets, but not so wholeheartedly or brilliantly, I'm afraid. Thus she will play with punctuation, lining up excess commas or ending poems with a dash, and interrupt the

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sequence of the book with breathless, parenthetical passages each called "(interruption)." Hillman does not need any of that stuff. The poem "A Foghorn," which follows a particularly self-conscious experiment called "untitled fragments," is proof. Imagining "all the divorced Californians" come out to the beach to watch the gray whale migration, she writes with profound humanity:

> They wait as if at the prow of a fatherless ship,
> leaning there; they have waited a long time,
> they are so used to waiting, they have waited for
> the winning number, or for the changes in someone,
> or for the nocturne to rewind itself around the spool—
> shouldn't something have pity on them now?

One name for that something is poetry, like the poetry in *Bright Existence.* It is a wonderful book.

So, too, is Ellen Bryant Voigt's new book.[6] It is, however, more restrained than Brenda Hillman's, less in search of the meaning of experience and less given to generalization, to the epigrammatized summary that is what we often bring away from a poem. It is more concerned with the contours, the drama, of events. The presence of classical material, both in myth and music, defines many of the poems. The book begins with how the artist or anyone for that matter makes her way toward articulation, toward that expression that creates the self. The most difficult, but the most beautiful poem is the first one, "First Song," and meditates on the figure of Hermes, "Shepherd, Augur, / Patron of Thieves, who had once been / Master of Invention . . ."

> who gave the world the musical scale,
> sounds become a sweetness and a power;
> who gave the world the alphabet,
> the mind made supple as the hand;
> who gave the world hymns of invocation,
> seven vowels uttered in succession,
> so mortals might petition
> blind fortune . . .

"First Song" is followed by "Effort at Speech," a homage to William Meredith and his poem of the same title and indirectly, I imagine, to Muriel Rukeyser, to whom Meredith dedicated his poem and who also wrote a poem called "Effort at Speech." Voigt's records an encounter with an even stranger otherness than their poems do. Through the glass wall of an aquarium, she watches a ray, "huge, delta-winged, bat-winged, / head subsumed in the spread pectorals." The final lines of the poem echo two other poems about the mind's attempt to

[6] TWO TREES, by *Ellen Bryant Voigt.* W. W. Norton. $17.95.

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articulate itself—Richard Wilbur's "Mind" and Theodore Roethke's "Night Crow":

> it skated along the glass—
> eagle scanning the sheer canyon wall,
> bat trapped inside the cave,
> no, like a mind at work, at play,
> I felt I was seeing through the skull—
> and then away.

This poem, so unlike "First Song," is followed by "At the Piano," which is unlike "Effort at Speech." Yet together the three form a chord that resonates throughout the book. It is the music of self-knowledge. Here are the opening lines of "At the Piano":

> At the piano, the girl, as if rowing upstream,
> is driving triplets against the duple meter,
> one hand for repetition,
> one hand for variation and for song.
> She knows nothing, but Bach knows everything.
> Outside, in the vast disordered world,
> the calves have been taken from their mothers;
> both groups bawled and hooted all night long—
> she heard them from her quilted double bed.

This persona, represented in some of Voigt's finest poems, is the daughter of a farmer, and the poignancy of her life is the potential split between the demands of art and family. The poem ends, "she knows nothing, she thinks / no one could be happier than this."

Knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and the inevitable cost concern Voigt throughout *Two Trees*. Its title poem retells the story of how the appetite for knowledge was acquired. Once expelled from the garden, "the mind cried out / for that addictive tree it had tasted." The other tree, the second tree, is of course the tree of eternal life; its fruit if tasted would have made us invulnerable to suffering. The final poem of *Two Trees* shows us Voigt's persona, herself now a grown woman and a mother, watching another girl, perhaps a daughter, "strapped in the bare mechanical crib" in a hospital. The drama of knowledge without the ability to end suffering is powerfully enacted.

Three of the poems in *Two Trees* come with sets of variations. Untitled, each of these ranges from the lyric to the aphoristic but suggests that there is something more to be gotten out, to be expressed. My favorite is only two lines long: "—Have you always told the truth? // I have always loved the truth." That is the best answer, I think, any of us can give.

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JOHN HAINES

In and Out of the Loop

THE FIRST THING THAT STRUCK ME on opening John Ashbery's new book[1] was the endorsement by Harold Bloom on the inside jacket, and from which I quote in part: "And more than ever Ashbery seems to be to the second half of our century what Stevens and Yeats were to the first." Having considered the apparent preposterousness of a claim like that, I thought that I might have missed something in my years of reading poetry, had misread the moderns as well as the classics, and had mislaid entirely my understanding of poetry's place and purpose in our lives.

In what sense, then, might Bloom's claim be understood? In order to answer that question I considered several possibilities, which I would frame as follows.

Imagine a Stevens who had lived into senility; had completely lost sight of what he had meant to say, his vision of poetry and imagination, and had yet retained his facility with words, a certain playful elegance of expression, a style inherited from his former, more active self:

> The midgets who stand on giants who stand on midgets
> in Palookaville . . .
>
> "Palookaville"

Or, imagine an Eliot who had mistaken his direction on his way to the *Quartets*, and had ended in repeating, with variations, the more gossipy and trivial parts of "Prufrock," "Portrait Of a Lady," and certain other poems of his early period. Had said, in effect, "Let us go, then . . ." and proceeded to an unending description of cakes and ices, of balding bachelors and teatime ladies, with hurried glances into a countryside completely altered from the one he began with, and with no apparent direction, no resolution, and no hope. As if he had said, "Ah, my friend, you do not know what life is . . ." and had proceeded to demonstrate that he also did not know where he was nor the significance of anything he had described to us, but had simply walked off and left us with a heap of incomprehensible fragments.

Or, imagine a Yeats who had never succeeded in facing the public events of his time other than as a distant and detached viewer; had

[1] HOTEL LAUTRÉAMONT, by *John Ashbery*. Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

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never confronted the turbulent politics of his homeland nor discovered in his writing the means to embody his feeling about these things in poems and plays; had never become the public spokesman he sometimes was, but had instead wandered off into a kind of versified tourist guide to romantic Ireland adorned with quotations from legends and fairy tales, and with now and then some tantalizing bit of current news thrown in to show that he was after all contemporary. And one knew at the outset that none of it was to be taken seriously, but was intended to be an amusement for people who thought that they might just understand a bit of it and perhaps take home with them a souvenir to show that they had been there.

These impromptu sketches will seem to some to be outrageous, an opposing exaggeration to match that of Bloom. But are they entirely beside the point? I don't think so.

> We bake a dozen kinds of muffins every day
> yet we are cold and disquieting at heart.
> I fear for his sciatica, though
> we were never lovers.
> Let me memorialize this mattress, M.
> le Comte . . .
> . . . . . .
> In the casual track of a zipper my penis
> once got stuck, and it's been like that ever since:
> feet stop where no snare lives, the best
> is to lie down and desist. Perhaps life is better
> near the Arctic Circle . . .
>
> "American Bar"

Could a poetry like this, with its constant shifting of images and viewpoints, have been written before the age of television? This seems to me to be a question worth asking, for reading these poems is uncannily like watching a series of sound bytes, of news images projected and then withdrawn, to be immediately replaced by others totally unrelated to what one had just been watching and listening to. Anything resembling a potential depth is dispersed in a moment; little remains but a sense of having been provoked into an expectation destined to remain unfulfilled.

If one were to concede that an age dominated by TV, by the public media and the constant distraction it provides, would produce a representative talent in poetry, one that for certain readers and critics would mimic what the media provides the general public, then perhaps an Ashbery, or someone like him, would be that poet.

> Think of it as some god-liberating whimsy
> that heaven and the emperor's mice detain

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in the province of boredom. The signor's wrath
is cold at these times, to nail the fizzle . . .
"Joy"

Another possibility occurs to me, and that is the impression to be gained (though *gain* does not seem to be the right word) from looking at the cultural landscape, at the fields and houses and people, while driving at speed through the countryside and the towns. And this fleetingness is further transposed to a nearly global scale, so that glimpses of architecture, episodes in history, names and events, are telescoped into a kind of weird and distorted travelogue, an international shopping spree, and with perhaps some trivial comment or moral at the end of it.

. . . Look, I have a vacuum cleaner.
In the janitor's hand some prurient
fun must be planned and I'll go where the washer decides me
into small dovecote openings that are for birds. Please
accept the running board of my road . . .
"The Wind Talking"

Only it does not end. Turn the page, and it continues with a new title. And into this hectic, driven journey with no destination are blown up from moment to moment scraps of newsprint, discarded announcements and ripped posters, to accompany, to illustrate and emphasize, the pop culture of our time, with its neon-lit totems that crowd the highways and litter the malls: *Buns*, *Tacos*, *Video Rentals*, *Used Cars*, *Cinema*, *Travel*, *Banking*, *Nintendo*, etc. . . . And all of it with no visible center, no perceptible order, and nearly without end. But here and there, through the blur of traffic signals, some fleeting sign of what was once a well-ordered street or neighborhood, with houses worth looking at and living in; now and then some barely visible clue that another and finer culture once dominated the scene.

Another day he likened it to the roar
of Paris traffic, how expensive it all seemed at first;
later, a sparrow . . .
"Alborado"

It may be that the key to reading these poems with some minimum enjoyment lies in seeing them as a kind of collage, of fairy tales combined with bits of news and gossip, arcane facts culled at random from whatever sources; and all of which when mixed together blow into the poems like grit on the wind. And for a moment, perhaps, when the wind slackens, a kind of clarity prevails before the cloud of dust, of bits and pieces, closes off the view once more.

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As when an elf
sits on a golf tee before you, and someone
behind you asks to play through: then, then
it doesn't matter much which of the old gypsy crones is
really a princess in disguise, with flowing
chocolate braids, and olive-dusted complexion! . . .
"Irresolutions on a Theme of
La Rochefoucauld"

One might say that what Ashbery does he does skillfully. Perhaps. But my impression is that what he does must be relatively easy to do, and this accounts for the abundance of it, for the number of books and the length of so many of the poems. There are no ideas to struggle with, no central vision to attempt to clarify. All that this writing requires is a certain facility with words, a handy catalogue, a map or two, some names, and a dictionary.

Some time later, in Provence,
you waxed enthusiastic about the tail
piece of a book, gosh how they
don't make them like that anymore in this century . . .
"Baked Alaska"

In our time and place license is carried to an extreme of absurdity. There are, however, other versions of reality. Could a poetry like Ashbery's have been written under conditions of political constraint, of dire threat, conditions that prevail at present, say, in Bosnia? Unlikely. My guess is that the poetry would more closely resemble the sinister nonsense of an untitled poem by Aleksandar Ristović, with its concluding stanza:

Time of fools is coming,
time of the know-nothing teacher
and the book that can't be opened
at either end.
(Trans. by Charles Simic)

There are, on the other hand, books that *can* be opened, and we are condemned to read them.

Nowhere in these poems do I find anything resembling the intellectual focus of a Stevens, that steady attention to an idea and to all that the idea embodies and leads to when faced with the problem of poetry and the world in which poetry must justify its existence. Characteristically, Ashbery in the better part of his work simply stands Stevens' rage for order on its head.

Nor is there anything like the personal quest of an Eliot, with its tormented vision of an intellectual and spiritual continuity always on

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Coming in the Autumn
1993 issue of
The Hudson Review:
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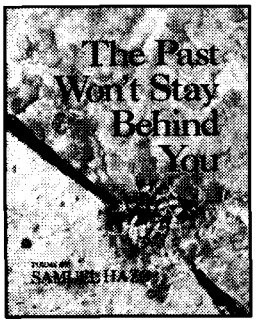

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the point of being lost; that search for which an entire life must be risked. One need not be an ivy league critic to appreciate the utter seriousness of these things.

If you can believe that the late and increasingly realized purpose of this society is to popularize and trivialize the better part of the artistic and intellectual inheritance of Western civilization, then by an inverted logic an overpaid sports hero becomes a genius, an Andy Warhol becomes a great artist, and a John Ashbery becomes the foremost poet of the day.

What is most apparent to me in reading these poems is a facility that seldom comes to rest on anything; an incoherence to match the incoherence of our time. But let me quote from a nearly-forgotten essay by Robinson Jeffers: ". . . it is not necessary, because an epoch is confused, that its poet should share its confusions." On the contrary. Rather than imitating the disorder of his time, the greater artist will seek to impose on it, on the material it presents to us, another and preferable order. It seems to me that this is what the representative poets of our time, whether we are speaking of Stevens, of Eliot, of Rilke, of Yeats, or of innumerable other poets, managed to do, each in his own way; and it seems to me further that it is the first responsibility of the serious writer to do so.

Hotel Lautréamont numbers 157 pages, and is an attractive book to look at. It contains 82 poems, many of them several pages long. Reading through them has been for me a rather tedious business, and I would have to say much the same for the other books by Ashbery I have looked into. This review is not the occasion for an extended assessment of Ashbery's work, nor would I be tempted to undertake it. Doubtless there are others more eager to do so, and who will find things in that work to celebrate. There are in fact moments in Ashbery that hint of something finer and more satisfying than we are mostly permitted to enjoy here. The third stanza of "Still Life with Stranger" seems to me to be one of those moments:

> Call these phenomena or pinpoints,
> remote as the glittering trash of heaven,
> yet the monstrous frame remains,
> filling up with regret, with straw,
> or on another level with the quick grace
> of the singing, falling snow.

The brilliance of that central image, "the glittering trash of heaven," is arresting. If only there was more of it. The opening poem of this collection, "Light Turnouts," a matter of four brief stanzas, is also compelling in its own way. And from an earlier book, *The Tennis Court Oath*, there is that lovely little poem, "Thoughts of a Young Girl." For me, Ashbery is best when briefest, in those poems where his talent for

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unexpected combinations and weird juxtapositions is concentrated and exposed to best effect.

Is this enough for a major poetry, for a representative poetry of this age? An answer to that depends on what you expect from poetry, on what, ideally, you want it to be. Those of us who look to poetry for something more than a versified equivalent of the public media will look elsewhere.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ERIC TORGERSEN, Professor of English at Central Michigan University, is at work on a book to be called *The Family: Rilke and the Barkenhoff Circle*. . . . MAXINE KUMIN's tenth book of poetry, *Looking for Luck*, published by W.W. Norton & Co., was a finalist in this year's National Book Critics Circle Awards. She is completing work on a collection of short fiction and prose essays. . . . JOHN HAINES's latest books are a prose work, *The Stars, the Snow, the Fire*, and *New Poems, 1980–88*, winner of the Lenore Marshall/Nation Award for the best book of poems in 1991. . . . X.J. KENNEDY's *Dark Horses: New Poems* was published in November 1992 by the Johns Hopkins University Press. . . . JOSEPH FRANK's most recent books are *Through the Russian Prism* and *The Idea of Spatial Form*. He is Professor Emeritus of Slavic Literature at Stanford. His essay in this issue is the revised version of a text to be included in a volume honoring Professor Robert L. Jackson of Yale University. . . . FRANK X. GASPAR's* first book, *The Holyoke* (Northeastern University Press), won the 1988 Morse Poetry Prize. . . . C.S. GISCOMBE, author of "Ontario Towns" (*The Hudson Review*, Winter 1991), teaches Creative Writing and African-American Literature at Illinois State University in Normal. . . . "Counting the Black Angels" is the title poem of LEN ROBERTS's* next collection, to be published by the University of Illinois Press in the spring of 1994. Roberts, who lives in Hellertown, Pennsylvania, is the author of five previous books of poems. . . . STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT's* first collection of poetry, *Instruments of the Bones* (1992), was the winner of Mid-List Press's "First Poetry Series" award in 1991.

JOHN HOLLOWAY has completed a second volume of autobiography, sequel to *A London Childhood*. . . . NEAL BOWERS' latest book, *Night Vision*, is about to go into a second printing. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY recently received the 1993 Edgar Award given by the Mystery Writers of America for his biography of the detective novelist S.S. Van Dine. . . . BERT CARDULLO has recently published an essay on *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Greenwood Press's *Confronting Tennessee Williams' "Streetcar": Essays in Critical Pluralism* (1993). . . . WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD's book *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered*, has just been published by the University of Massachusetts Press in a second edition with a new preface by the author. . . . BRIAN COX (who formerly published as "C.B. Cox") has just brought out his autobiography, *The Great Betrayal*. His *Collected Poems* will be published by Carcanet later this year. . . . TESS LEWIS is a translator and writer living in New York. Her translation of Ingeborg Bachmann's posthumous novels will appear in late 1993. . . . MARK JARMAN's latest book is *Iris*, a book-length poem. He has recently completed a libretto for *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, an opera by Michael Alec Rose based on Thomas Hardy's novel.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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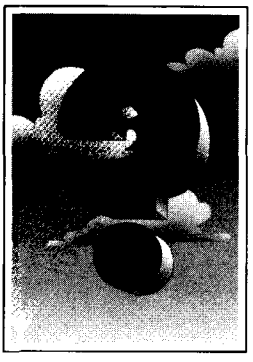

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